THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Breathing Spaces and Afterlives: The Colonial Literary Canon and Joseph Conrad's Female Characters

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Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

2018

Abstract

In his introduction to the fourth Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, Paul Armstrong argues that the text has 'become part of the cultural air we breathe' (ix). If *Heart of Darkness* has been memorialised as a ubiquitous marker of late nineteenth century imperialist literature, so pervasively influential that its consumption has become inevitable and unquestioned, it is also specific bodies that have been marked as the expected inhabitants of cultural history. The Conrad that has been canonised is one whose work is exclusively populated by angst-ridden, ambivalent white male colonial agents wringing their hands about Empire and masculinity, so that it is the experiences of straight white men that are the ones given space and capital in the cultural archive.

Yet Conrad's work is not exclusively populated by white men at all, it has only been recorded as such by a body of scholarship that has invested in the perpetuation of Conrad as writer of and for white men. In this thesis, I consider the breathing spaces in Conrad's writing in which women of colour become the speaking, thinking, mobile protagonists, who discuss the ways Empire and masculinity have affected their lives. I look at the desires of these female characters and the relationships between them to argue that sexually active and/or queer female bodies take up space in the oeuvre of a dead white man, because they took up space in the world in which he wrote. I argue that their disappearance from the Conrad canon is a symptom of ongoing discriminatory discourses that insist on the able body of the straight white man as the only legitimate subject for power. To counter this critical negligence, I use my thesis to stage the afterlives of Conrad's female characters of colour, analysing the ways in which these characters have materialised in visual media alongside and after the publication of Conrad's texts.

I take Conrad's Lingard Trilogy – *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) and *The Rescue* (1920) – as the central corpus around which I structure my work. Spanning the course of Conrad's writing career, populated by vibrant, intelligent, complicated women, but memorialised in Conrad scholarship in relation to a male character (Tom Lingard), the trilogy emblematises the cultural codes that inform the way Conrad's texts and characters have been remembered.

Each section of my thesis probes first the breathing space offered by the female characters that I believe dominate these texts, then the afterlife they have been afforded (or denied) in illustrations, paratexts and adaptations. In Part 1, I argue that the sexually charged moments of intimacy between Edith and Immada in *The Rescue*, and Freya and Antonia in Conrad's 'Freya of the Seven Isles' (1912), deserve to be recognised as textual spaces of lesbian desire. This reading is juxtaposed with an analysis of the illustrations that accompanied the periodical serialisations of the texts, that have taken on new life as digital objects in the periodical archive Conrad First. In Part 2, I contend that *An Outcast of the Islands* counters

clichés of imperial sexuality with the eloquent expression of desire from Aïssa, a Malay-Arab woman who falls in love with a white man. Exploring Aïssa's depiction on the covers of 1950s-60s American mass market paperback editions, I propose that she materialised in pulp form in ways that trouble both Conrad's highbrow status and the racial politics of the text. In Part 3, I posit *Almayer's Folly* as a story that is centred around female characters of colour – Nina Almayer, Mrs Almayer and Taminah – who galvanize the plot, and articulate virulent anti-imperialist critiques. That these women are not as well-known as the white men of *Heart of Darkness* is a symptom of what Susan Jones has described as the 'masculine tendency of Conrad criticism' (2001, 37). I see Chantal Akerman's film adaptation *La Folie Almayer* as a counterpoint to this critical neglect, as Akerman's direction and Aurora Marion's performance reposition Nina as the text's central protagonist.

Ultimately, I argue that the women of colour that populate Conrad's works, as women with desires, voices, political beliefs, agency and power, matter to the formation of the colonial literary canon, because when prioritised properly they reflect a historical archive that is more representative of the varying bodies that populate our own world. By examining the material spaces these characters occupy, I offer this thesis as another afterlife, and a breathing space from the Conrad scholarship that has denied them.

Lay Summary

This thesis is concerned with the way certain narratives of human experience are recorded in literature as default. Packaged in anthologies, placed on bookshelves marked 'classics' in Waterstones, and listed as prescribed reading on University curricula, *Heart of Darkness* is probably Joseph Conrad's best-known work. This exemplifies the way dead white men who wrote books about dying white men still occupy a position of authority in terms of cultural history. Conrad wrote many more texts, a substantial number of which featured articulate, brave and nuanced female characters of colour, but it is most often his texts that centre on narratives of white men that are most widely studied.

In this thesis, I concentrate on his lesser-known works and devote my attention to those underread textual moments in which desiring female characters are the focus of the narrative, rather than white men. I argue that the presentation of Edith and Immada in Conrad's *The Rescue* (1920), Freya and Antonia in his short story 'Freya of the Seven Isles' (1912), Aïssa in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and Nina, Mrs Almayer and Taminah in *Almayer's Folly* all reflect different kinds of racial and sexual politics to the ones we might expect to find in late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperial literature. Within these texts, there are moments where we see issues of race, sexuality and Empire from traditionally marginalised perspectives of traditionally marginalised women, such as from women of colour and women who desire women. This is significant because so much of Western cultural history has been remembered as something that happened to and through the bodies of straight white men, and this has legitimated the power straight white male bodies have today as expected, 'natural' leaders.

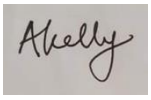
Much of my experience writing this thesis has been influenced by the politics of what we are allowed to say about established literary figures like Conrad, and who is allowed to say these things. In order to shake off the associations of Conrad with the 'classics' bookshelf, to move beyond thinking of his work in terms of highbrow worthiness that perpetuates the idea of creative genius residing in the body of the straight white man, I look at moments when Conrad's work has been transformed into other types of media. I examine the illustrations that accompanied his fiction when it was serialised in early twentieth century magazines (that are now online), the book covers of cheap 1950s and 60s American paperback editions, and a recent feminist film adaptation from the avant-garde Belgian director Chantal Akerman.

I imagine the different versions of these female characters, drawn on cheap paper, projected on the cinema screen or accessible through a digital archive on my laptop, as ways in which these characters have outlived their author. Given that Conrad has been remembered as belonging to a type of literary history dominated by white men, I think of the textual moments that are focused on his female characters, moments where they speak, think, look, move and yearn for each other, as breathing spaces in that literary history. I think of their recurring

images appearing in illustrations, on book covers and in film alongside or years after the texts were originally published as a kind of afterlife for these characters. I want my own work to be another afterlife for them, a space in which we can remember them as representing something more than the dead white man who wrote about them.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signature: 

Date:05/09/2018

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the financial support of the Wolfson Foundation who have funded this project. Special thanks also go to the Department of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, with notable mentions for Penny Fielding and Carole Jones for their incredible support throughout my academic career, and to Simon Cooke whose feedback on early versions of chapters 1 and 3 was invaluable. Thanks also to Susan Jones for encouraging me with this project, and Aurora Marion for sharing her experiences so openly with me in her interview. I'd also like to acknowledge the wonderful contribution of my second supervisor David Farrier, who encouraged me to try putting more of myself into my thesis.

Thank you to the people who have made this experience not just possible, but hugely positive: Sarah Stewart, for introducing me to the life-changing work of Sara Ahmed, Lindy West and Kate Beaton, and for screaming into the void with me sometimes; my sister Katy, for all the feminist LOLs; my superstar supervisor Michelle Keown, for giving me the freedom, insight and unwavering enthusiasm to keep me going when things were horrible; and Sue, for your genius ideas, time, faith, pep talks and excellent cooking – none of this would have happened without you.

Final thanks to the sunshine in my life that are my golden retrievers. From the lovely Max who used to lie across my books as I was reading them, to Maeve the brave whose brown eyes are criminally distracting, to our rescuer Bailey who takes my hands off the keyboard when she thinks it's time for a cuddle – you have kept me grounded and very happy.

List of Abbreviations

AF	*Almayer's Folly*
OI	*An Outcast of the Islands*
C	*Chance: A Tale in Two Parts*
FSI	'Freya of the Seven Isles'
HD	*Heart of Darkness*
LCG	*Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham*
CL	*The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*
R	*The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows*
TLS	*'Twixt Land and Sea*
V	*Victory: An Island Tale*

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Introduction: How's Conrad? Still Dead.

I am sure I am not the only doctoral student to dread any and all social questions about the progress of my research. There comes a point at which the question 'how's the writing going?' can only be met with a low, shuddering sigh and a quick deflect. At the beginning, I used to think Conrad and I were great pals. Now, like many old flatmates, we have lived together for too long, we know each other too well, his fun quirks drive me mad and it's time for him to move out. This is one of the many reasons I am weary of the social 'how's-the-PhD?' greeting, because (as I write about at length in this thesis) 'Conrad' is an overloaded, complicated subject to discuss and not one I can talk about in unencumbered ways. These pressures condensed memorably when I was once asked a version of 'how's-the-PhD?' that I could not answer: 'How's Conrad?'. When I came home and told my partner about this interaction, she said 'what did you say? HE'S STILL DEAD?!', and thus a mantra was born.

This reminder, that regardless of my encounters under the sign of 'Conrad,' he is still dead, echoes one of the most established doctrines of literary criticism to enable inclusive, revisionist approaches to canonical works and authors. In 'The Death of the Author', Roland Barthes bemoans the tendency of literary criticism to search for a text's meaning through the biography of the author, 'as if it were always in the end, [. . .] the *author* "confiding" in us' (emphasis original, 1322). He counters that 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (1324). For Barthes it is the reader, not the author, who brings this 'multi-dimensional space' to life:

> a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (1325)

It is these destinations that drive this thesis, as I am not concerned with 'the message of the Author-God', but with where we find Conrad, what we are allowed to say about him, and who is allowed to say it.

Ironically, if we were to worry about Conrad's intentions, we would find he also believed 'a text's unity lies [. . .] in its destination', writing to his friend Cunninghame Graham, 'one writes only half the book; the other half is with the reader' (LCG, 46). Conrad expected his readers to fill in the gaps of his texts and construct their own unique versions of his narratives. Jeremy Hawthorn argues Conrad's fondness for ellipses, silences and guesswork dramatize this role of the reader: 'Conrad's concern to encourage his readers to write half of

the novel, to exercise his or her imagination, requires that he carefully control the information that readers are given. Where omitting "narratively pertinent" information will have the desired effect then information is omitted' (2011, 22). However, the example he gives of 'narratively pertinent information' being omitted is burdened with socio-cultural assumptions.

Hawthorn fills in the silence of a chapter break in Conrad's novel *Victory* (1914) by assuming that two characters have sex, stating 'it is clear that the break between the fourth and fifth chapters of Part III represents a temporal gap during which readers are encouraged to assume that Lena and Heyst make love' (2011, 9). But a closer reading of the passage in question shows that the 'half-the-book' Hawthorn is writing by presenting this scene as consensual 'love-making' privileges the male character's perspective of these events. For me, the chapter break is more suggestive of rape:

> Before she could make a movement or even turn her head his way, he took her in his arms and kissed her lips. He tasted on them the bitterness of a tear fallen there. He had never seen her cry. It was like another appeal to his tenderness – a new seduction. The girl glanced round, moved suddenly away, and averted her face. With her hand she signed imperiously to him to leave her alone – a command which Heyst did not obey. (V, 164)

Heyst kisses Lena against her will, refuses to 'obey her command' to be left alone, and interprets signs of her emotion, distress and resistance as superficial acts designed to further entice him. The more uncomfortable and anguished Lena becomes, the more aggressive Heyst grows in his advances.

The opening of the next chapter equally speaks to Lena's trauma:

> When she opened her eyes at last and sat up, Heyst scrambled quickly to his feet and went to pick up her cork helmet, which had rolled a little way off. Meanwhile she busied herself in doing up her hair, plaited on the top of her head in two heavy, dark tresses, which had come loose. He tendered her the helmet in silence, and waited as if unwilling to hear the sound of his own voice.
>
> 'We had better go down now,' he suggested in a low tone. He extended his hand to help her up. He had the intention to smile, but abandoned it at the nearer sight of her still face, in which was depicted the infinite lassitude of her soul. (V, 165)

While it may be possible to read Heyst's behaviour – his scurrying away, his reluctance to speak, his inability to smile – as guilt, the product of an illicit but consensual sexual encounter, there is equal textual innuendo to suggest that this is not consensual. Though we are not in Lena's head, we still have an image of her, her movements, a facial expression Heyst has interpreted as 'infinite lassitude,' and no particular reason to trust Heyst's viewpoint. We may instead probe Lena's weariness, the fact that she has been lying with her eyes closed (unconscious?), her despoiled hair with which she 'busies' herself as soon as she gets up (instead of engaging with Heyst), and wonder what she has experienced, how she is feeling, rather than passively accepting only the perspective of the character through which these scenes are focalised. Where Hawthorn argues Conrad 'omits "narratively pertinent" information' for the sake of 'desired effect', I would argue that the 'omission' of this event

signified by the chapter break represents sex that is constituted by enforced silence, mirroring the loss of agency, choice and voice typical in rape narratives.

The ambiguity surrounding these moments means that the myriad choices that readers make when they read any text become manifest here. That Hawthorn chooses not to question Lena's perspective, taking-as-read her willingness, because Heyst takes-it-as-read, points to the way choices are made in Conrad scholarship to perpetuate the importance of male narratives at the expense of stories of women. Hawthorn's choice to fill the chapter break in *Victory* with an assumption that the characters 'make love', suggests that the gaps in Conrad's writing will always be filled and are always already filled. Resonances will be attached, are always already attached, to certain bodies in certain spaces in Conrad's work.

Rita Felski contends that heteropatriarchal readings are embodied in texts, presupposed by the reader:

> Writing is a painstaking act of carving bodies, movements, spaces, and rhythms out of an amorphous flux of words. Literature gives us a world that is profoundly particular, that is utterly *this* and not *that.*
>
> Yet there is a lack of symmetry in the way we learn to analogize from such particulars, to extract general meanings from concrete detail. For example, we are accustomed to finding broader resonances in male bodies, glimpsing the sublime in the stories of heroic struggle and drawing existential metaphors out of images of male solitude. We are less used to endowing female bodies with this kind of authority and reading female lives as rich in general resonances. I suspect this is true of men and women, who both learn to think of woman as the embodiment of her sex rather than as a symbol of the human. (emphasis original, 17)

Felski's work highlights the need for a reading strategy that privileges women as members of universal humanity, rather than muse-like symbols who can only ever resonate as the object-bodies brooding male heroes encounter. She encourages us to search for the female bodies that attract us and entrust them with a history, a back-story, and contexts that signify who we want them to be. I choose to find resonance in the female characters who populate Conrad's writing, and in the intimate and intense moments between them, in an attempt to 'endow them with authority' and read their lives 'as rich in general resonances'. Felski's contentions suggest that Hawthorn's investment in Heyst as a character with a more valuable viewpoint than that of Lena is indicative of the way certain bodies have traditionally been allowed to take up space in the Conrad canon while others have not.

Sticky Conrad

Chris Bongie demonstrates the way 'Conradian' operates as a sign, when he demarcates *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* as the incontrovertible markers of Conrad's genius. He writes of 'that undifferentiated perspective which is already [Conrad's], from the time he first takes pen to paper, but with which he will only come to grips in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*' (150). *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, texts that inarguably prioritise the experiences, perspectives and existential angst of white men, also inarguably constitute Conrad's

'undifferentiated perspective', according to Bongie. He argues that 'In these works, the matter of guilt and innocence is no longer at issue', but 'the passage from exotic difference to colonial indifferentiation is nonetheless not forgotten in these *more properly Conradian works*' (emphasis added, 150). In the process of writing about Conrad's rejection of imperial binaries in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, as part of his argument that these novels characterise Conrad's rhetorical manipulation of Victorian colonial codes, Bongie very casually introduces 'Conradian' as a sliding, slippery term. Being written by Conrad no longer qualifies a text to be considered 'properly Conradian'. Bongie tells us that to be 'of Conrad', a text must present colonial boundaries in the same way as they are presented in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, it must employ the same formal strategies (demonstrate the same 'com[ing]-to-grips-with') as 'these more properly Conradian works'. However, when the most basic, unavoidable narrative strategy that links *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* is that they are both narrated by a (putatively) straight white man, this suggests that for a text to be 'Conradian', it must always voice Empire in the language of European masculinity.

More than this, Bongie's deployment of the term 'Conradian' dictates that to travel beneath its sign requires the renouncement of narrative voices that do not come from straight white male characters. Bongie writes of 'Conrad's early novels, which *we, along with the vast majority of Conradians*, may think of as the product of his "artistic immaturity," subscribe – albeit uneasily – to the traditional vision that generated nineteenth-century exoticism. Gauguin's "native of old" is assuredly present in *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *Outcast of the Islands* [sic] (1896): indigenous females, mysterious and potentially salvational objects of desire' (emphasis added, 151). Quoting D.C.R.A Goonetilleke, Bongie sees *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, two of the novels at the heart of this thesis because of the outspoken, passionate, insightful female characters that occupy them, as 'products of [Conrad's] "artistic immaturity"'. The '"artistic immaturity"' the texts represent for Bongie is constituted by a 'traditional vision' of exoticism, which he in turn attributes to the presence of 'indigenous females'. Unlike *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, therefore, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* would fall into the category of 'less properly Conradian works', in Bongie's lexicon, because the politics of imperialism in these texts are represented by Malay female characters. Note also how the bodies of the characters that inhabit prominent and even narratorial roles in the would-be 'less properly Conradian works' have to be signalled as Others and redefined in relation to men ('mysterious and potentially salvational objects of desire'), whereas Marlow's very obvious presence as narrator in both the 'more properly Conradian works' draws no comment from Bongie, because straight white male speakers are default. Most significantly of all, Bongie suggests that those who do not subscribe to this valuation of the Conrad canon, being outside of the privileged 'we' to whom he speaks, are not really 'proper Conradians' either.

Terry Collits similarly constructs 'Conradian' as a cultural space in which only some bodies can reside, when he argues 'The distinctively Conradian perspective on empire was revealed around the turn of the new century with the publication of two powerful complementary narratives, *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*' (12). Like Bongie, Collits invests *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* with the mantle of Conrad's cultural capital. In this discourse Conrad has worth as an author (with an output to be memorialised), because of these two texts. Collits goes on to use them to delimit the borders of what he terms 'the first Conradian moment':

> This makes 1900 (rather than 1890, the year following Conrad's transforming Congo voyage when he began his first novel) the appropriate beginning date for the period on which we are focusing. The [first Conradian] moment might be said to end with the Great War of 1914-1918. Those dates situate Conrad's major writings in the middle of what historians routinely call either 'the age of imperialism' or 'the new imperialism'. A world-changing cataclysm was thus bound up indirectly with the production and destiny of the Conradian *oeuvre*. (emphasis original, 12)

Collits attaches 'the Conradian oeuvre' to the period 1900-1918, thereby consciously excluding Conrad's early work, such as *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of Islands* (1896), as well his later writing, such as *The Rescue* (1920). This trilogy of novels – known as the Lingard trilogy – stages women of colour in prominent roles that are far more disruptive than Bongie's 'salvational objects of desire' suggests: *Almayer's Folly* follows a mixed-race young woman as she navigates the cultural differences that have shaped her identity; *An Outcast of the Islands* sees a Malay-Arab woman fall in love with a white man; and *The Rescue* features the erotically charged encounter between a Malay woman and a white woman. But for Collits (and Bongie), none of these texts could possibly offer a 'Conradian perspective on empire', as if the most 'Conradian' perspectives on empire just happen to be the ones without women; 'Conradian' again comes to mean straight and white and male.

This construction of 'Conradian' resonates with Michel Foucault's writing on the way author names come to denote specific cultural codes: 'the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary, fleeting words. Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates' (1481). An author's name performs as a sign, not just for the work produced by the author, Foucault suggests, but for the type of language that becomes attached to the author. The author name moves as cultural currency, marking certain words as more load-bearing than others. Thus, 'the function of an author,' Foucault writes, 'is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society' (1481). But when 'Conradian' is designed to signify only the texts that centre the themes associated with Conrad (of racial, sexual, cultural anxieties) in the bodies of white men, it is

particularly exclusionary discourses that come to 'exist, circulate, and operate' under the sign of 'Conrad'.

'Conrad' the sign, rather than the person, represents something in literary scholarship that appears to be strictly policed; I maintain throughout this project that he is allowed to affect certain scholars in certain ways, inspiring particular reactions and emphatically not others. In this way, in the way he is written about and talked about, 'Conrad' becomes a sign 'sticky' with certain emotions, as Sara Ahmed evocatively puts it, 'or saturated with affect' (2014a, 194-195). Indeed, Susan Jones describes how gendered feelings have shaped the canonical 'Conrad': 'The reception of his work in modernist circles privileged a narrow band of texts that focused on male experience', while his 'creation of a central female protagonist [in *Chance*] has often been heralded as the moment when his artistic powers began to diminish' (2001, 2-3). Jones highlights the way that when existential angst is expressed through male bodies in Conrad's fiction, literary criticism places value on those works and their author (as Bongie and Collits have already exemplified), but when questions of identity and selfhood are asked by female characters, his output is reshaped to exclude those works as missteps: 'his supporters promoted those works as modernist in which women feature less prominently, making these texts pragmatic of his "genius"' (2001, 23). The stickiness of the 'Conradian' sign, Jones indicates, means that only certain characters, occupying certain types of bodies (straight, white, male), have been allowed to be attached to Conrad's 'genius'. The implication is that Conrad is a genius when he is writing about men, because it is always only writing about men (by men) that is allowed to qualify as genius.

In 1979, Robert Hodges wrote that Conrad's 'work has been made to function as part of the official masculine mystique. Male readers like to think of him as a heterosexual man's writer' (391). Hodges argues this canonization of Conrad is a symptom of an insecure, heteronormative body of scholarship: 'literary intellectuals have had special need for this particular image of Conrad, for literary studies do not appear as a particularly masculine activity in a society long obsessed with polarizing the sexes. Conrad's works are conscripted as reassuring proof of literature's essential masculinity' (391). I will return to Hodges' essay in Chapter 1, but what is crucial here is his contention that this anxious literary critical tradition of which he writes uses 'Conrad' to perform as a sign of heterosexual masculinity, just as Jones argues his writing has been deemed valuable when it has been populated by male characters.

These contentions regarding that to which Conrad's name has been allowed to be attached further evoke Ahmed's 'sticky signs', as she argues that within the 'sticky sign' is a movement of different bodies being stuck together or kept apart. 'Sticky signs' allow certain bodies to be associated with them and with each other, and not others: 'this model of "sticky signs" shows how language works as a form of power in which emotions align some bodies with others, as well as stick different figures together, by the way they move us' (Ahmed, 2014a, 195). As I will show, the bodies that are allowed to move through Conrad's texts,

beyond their pages and into scholarly discourse, are almost always white and straight and male. Where Conrad is concerned, it becomes clear that certain things are allowed to intersect with the author, certain topics are allowed to come up in conversation about him, and certain things are not. The bodies who are put together in this space, in the 'Conradian' discourse Foucault's work suggests is attached to his name, can only follow the expected tracks of their heteropatriarchal, imperial roles in the scholarship, regardless of how they actually move within the texts.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the ongoing critical treatment of the 'savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; [. . .] ominous and stately' (HD, 60) woman Marlow sees in the Belgian Congo in *Heart of Darkness*. The way she is written about in literary criticism reflects the ways in which female characters can disappear in the discussion of the Conrad canon, even when it is those characters in the spotlight. Ioana Boghian typifies the casual assumptions that continue to figure her, when she writes 'The phrase "to go native" illustrates the unsuccessful attempt to conquer and enslave Africa – suggested analogously as the impossibility of subduing *Kurtz's wild, gorgeous and powerful, and nameless mistress*' (emphasis added, 756). One cannot write of 'going native,' without invoking a putative sexual relationship between Kurtz and the woman who has become known as *his* mistress. This lexical slippage is even evident in Jones' work, as she strives to trace the iconography of this nameless woman, but falls back on a recurring sign for her: 'one of the most notable literary images of the African 'other', that of *Kurtz's mistress* in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' (emphasis added, 2013, 151); 'Conrad's famous image of *Kurtz's African mistress*' (emphasis added, 2013, 152); 'Conrad's vibrant image of *Kurtz's African mistress*' (emphasis added, 2013, 172). Like that of Boghian, Jones' writing reflects not a deliberate policy towards this character, but rather the difficulty of naming her without relying on racial or sexual stereotypes. Andrew Michael Roberts makes a similar point about the naming of 'Kurtz's intended': 'it is difficult to refer to the woman whom Marlow meets at the end of the story other than by this term, which involves the critic in replicating her objectivity and the subordination of her subjectivity to Kurtz's will' (457). It is equally difficult to refer to the 'savage and superb' woman in ways that do not define her in terms of Kurtz.

Significantly, these are the most readily available examples of this lexical slip because it is the critics that are actively naming her at the centre of their writing that require a sign under which she can be represented. This tension, where the critics that talk about this character the most paradoxically become the ones that bind her to a signification that silences her, is best encapsulated by Marianna Torgovnick's argument:

> It is a curious fact that the novella does not do more than hint, for example, in the most indirect way, at Kurtz's relation to the woman who presides over the Africans' farewell; it is an even more curious fact that no critic I have encountered pays much attention to her either. Kurtz has apparently mated with the magnificent black woman and thus violated the British code against miscegenation, a code

> backed by the policy of bringing wives and families with colonists and administrators whenever possible. The woman is decked with leggings and jewellery that testify to a high position among the Africans – the position, one assumes, of Kurtz's wife. (397)

Where Torgovnick, writing in 1990, objects to what she considers to be a lack of interest in this female character, she attempts to reconstruct a life for her, not as 'Kurtz's mistress' but as his wife. However, the same implications that make the casual, convenient moniker 'Kurtz's mistress' so troubling, equally infuse Torgovnick's contention, as it unquestioningly presupposes that 'Kurtz has apparently mated with the magnificent black woman.' The way Boghian, Jones and Torgovnick refer to this character perpetuates a definition of her in terms of a white man, whose sexuality is given the meaning-making power to name and possess her. Furthermore, the passive, objectified role she occupies in Torgovnick's formulation as the black body with which Kurtz mates, denoting the break of the code of imperial sexuality, positions her as the symbol of his apparent transgression and thus the bearer of the shame attached to miscegenation.

Most significantly of all, this name 'Kurtz's mistress' or 'wife' (which is no better), is violently heteronormative. The naming of this character represents the process by which the actions of a woman of colour are uncritically assumed to be motivated by inevitable, omnipresent heterosexual desire for a white man. The entirety of her contact with Kurtz, the sum total of the textual evidence for this apparent 'mating', is the testimony of the harlequin:

> I have been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn't decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don't understand . . . No – it's too much for me. Ah, well, it's all over now. (HD, 60)

That she could have no other reason to attempt to see Kurtz, or to talk to him 'like a fury [. . .] for an hour,' other than that she is his 'mistress', inscribes her entire identity as (hetero)sexual. Calling her 'Kurtz's mistress' based on the ramblings of a man who has no insight into their contact because he cannot speak her language, 'do[es]n't understand,' and because 'it's too much for' him, actively perpetuates the broader heteronormative, patriarchal and colonial cultural discourses that disavow the agency and voice of women of colour. In Conrad scholarship, this female character can only be discussed in ways that presuppose an innately oversexed heterosexual and racial identity.

Even critics who recognise the lack of textual evidence regarding this character still choose to reproduce these stereotypes. Richard J. Ruppel, writing of the passage I quoted above, as he proposes a homoeroticism between Kurtz and the Harlequin, acknowledges that this is 'the one scene [. . .] that actually joins her with Kurtz' (32). However, he still unquestioningly frames her motivations as sexual: 'she complains bitterly about the Harlequin, her erotic rival. [. . .] her sexuality is debilitating and, ultimately, deadly; Kurtz's liaison with her

is the ultimate sign of his degeneration in the jungle' (32). The language Ruppel relies upon to tie this character to the 'liaison' he believes has taken place between her and Kurtz casts her as a contaminant endangering the white male colonial agent. Not only does Ruppel highlight the lack of textual evidence, before presenting his reductive reading of her regardless, but he also recognises the critical misrepresentation of this character before prolonging it: 'while Kurtz's African Mistress is never identified as anything but the "woman" and "she" in the story, critics have settled on "African Mistress" as an appropriate shorthand appellation' (32). The contraction inherent in a 'shorthand appellation' that recirculates female characters of colour as sexual objects and racial stereotypes in the literary canon involves much more violence than Ruppel suggests. When he stretches this shorthand to write that 'Kurtz's African consort certainly comes across as a femme fatale, in the dominatrix mode, but she remains a *symbol* of threatening female sexuality' (emphasis original, 32), he reflects the neo-colonial assumptions of a body of scholarship that has repeatedly refused to read this character as she actually appears in the text. 'Conradian' discourse becomes one that overdetermines the image of a woman of colour to such an extent that the codes of heteronormative, neo-colonial, sexual and racial stereotypes are recirculated over and over again.

Moreover, it is this type of discourse that circulates under the sign of 'Conrad' most regularly and the one that most people will encounter, as it is a language of scholarship that has been built in regard to his most well-known text. In his introduction to the 2006 Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, Paul B. Armstrong argues the text can be described as a 'classic,' because it 'continues to be read, if only because it has already been read again and again and has thereby become part of the cultural air we breathe' (ix). Armstrong's metaphor posits *Heart of Darkness* as such a ubiquitous cultural presence that our consumption of it is inevitable; we apparently have no choice but to inhale it, recirculate it, and pass it on. But the 'cultural air' we are breathing here is one in which women of colour are refused space both inside and outside of the text.

Toni Morrison argues that this kind of canonization, in which white male bodies are validated as meaning-making both as creators and characters, looks casual when it emphatically is not. She writes of what she calls 'the nineteenth-century flight from blackness' (138) in 'classic' American literature, 'It only seems that the canon of American literature is "naturally" or "inevitably" "white." In fact it is *studiously so*. In fact these absences of vital presences in Young American literature may be the insistent fruit of the scholarship rather than the text' (emphasis added, 139). The white-male-ness of the literary canon has been studiously constructed, built with the bricks of scholarship and preserved in its hallowed halls. The colonial canon is not an emblem of the universality of dead white men, but the way the experiences of dead white men have been heralded as universal, because as Morrison reminds us, 'Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense' (132). 'The cultural air we breathe' is not a naturally occurring, organic gathering of works, but a structure

based on other structures (like race and gender) designed to naturalise the circulation of white male bodies as the producers of meaning. It is the meaning-making power of Kurtz, Marlow and the Harlequin we are inhaling when the cultural air we breathe only leaves space for women if they are named in relation to men.

However, the stickiness of the heteronormative, masculinist, misogynist 'Conrad' – in which women of colour materialise as belongings of the random white men they briefly encounter – can be unstuck when we read *for* these female characters in the texts themselves. Within the Conrad canon there are textual pockets, where women of colour speak as agents and enact their cultural identities and sexual desires, that offer a break from 'the cultural air we breathe.'

Morrison interrogates the way the 'white' canon of American literature has been naturalised as inhabited by white bodies, without reference to the texts themselves:

> Perhaps some [of these writers] were not so much [. . .] escaping blackness, as they were transforming it into intelligible, accessible, yet artistic modes of discourse. To ignore this possibility by never questioning the strategies of transformation is to disenfranchise the writer, diminish the text, and render the bulk of the literature aesthetically and historically incoherent – an exorbitant price for cultural (whitemale) purity, and, I believe, a spendthrift one. (139)

Texts, authors and literary criticism are underserved when we fail to at least ask where all the non-white, non-male, non-straight people are in a story. The perpetuation of the colonial canon is, as Morrison has argued, a 'studious' endeavour, which makes disrupting it a scholarly one too, as Órla Meadhbh Murray suggests, 'For white academics there is a particular imperative to acknowledge our complicity in perpetuating the white canon, but to acknowledge that this complicity also affords us opportunity to *challenge from within*' (emphasis added, 182). My challenge to the colonial canon is situated not just from within academia, but from within the colonial canon too. Within the imperial lexicon of the colonial literary canon, there are pockets of stories being told that are not from the perspective of white men. I call these moments breathing spaces, and I ask what the colonial canon could come to mean if we explored them, if we used them to take a breather from 'the cultural air we breathe'; 'With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility' (Ahmed 2017, 221).

Breathing Spaces

Tineke Hellwig begins her paper 'Asian Women in the Lives of Dutch Tea Planters' with the following reparative intentions:

> to unearth Indonesian women who transgressed racial boundaries and entered the life and domestic space of Dutch men. [. . .] to subvert the white, male discourse, which has erased Asian women, their agency and subjectivity. To find these women means to listen to those who did not speak, and to give significance to what has been annihilated. [To focus] on the subaltern voices which were silenced in the hegemony of a masculine imperial discourse. (162)

Giving 'significance to what has been annihilated', finding 'erased Asian women, their agency

and subjectivity, *within* the 'masculine imperial discourse' that obliterated them, redistributes the value of that discourse and the codes by which it has been deemed worth preserving. Seeing these women here changes this space. Hellwig contends that in order 'To give them a face, a name, and a voice, we must turn away from official European histories where the subaltern cannot speak' (175-176), but if instead of 'turning away' we *lean in* to those 'official European histories,' we can change what they signify and who they are working for. If we choose to deny their primacy and continually read for something more, we can make that history speak for all the bodies that populated it rather than the straight white male ones. The colonial canon has been constructed to tell the story of some bodies and not others, but all bodies are in that history somewhere, as Ahmed writes, 'Brownness has a lesbian history, because there are brown lesbians in history; whether or not you could see us, whether or not you knew where to find us' (2017, 230). It has always been the work of postcolonial, feminist and queer theorists to find the bodies we were told could not be seen.

In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously posits the female subaltern as 'doubly effaced', 'even more deeply in shadow' (32), because she is circumscribed by both colonial and patriarchal structures that keep her silent and 'without lines of social mobility' (28). Spivak argues that when faced with the 'unrepresentable subaltern subject', that cannot 'know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation' (32), but to engage in the project of 'put[ting] together a "voice,"' asking 'What does this signify? – and begin[ning] to plot a history' (33). For Spivak, reading for the motivations of self-immolating Hindu widows in the police records of the East India Company's archives, 'put[ting] together a "voice"' is not possible: 'The most one can sense is the immense heterogeneity breaking through even such a skeletal and ignorant account' (33). Spivak discerns this 'immense heterogeneity' from the 'grotesquely mistranscribed names' (33) of the sacrificed widows, meaning she herself does not 'abstain from representation' despite this void in 'official European history.'

Spivak directly confronts the privileged position of dominant Western narratives, and the question of how to approach them with the effaced subaltern in mind, in her discussion of Freud's feminization of hysteria:

> The masculine-imperialist ideological formation that shaped that desire [to give the hysteric a voice] into 'the daughter's seduction' is part of the same formation that constructs the monolithic 'third-world woman.' No contemporary metropolitan investigator is not influenced by that formation. Part of our 'unlearning' project is to articulate our participation in that formation – by *measuring* silences, if necessary – into the *object* of investigation. Thus, when confronted with the questions, Can the subaltern speak? Can the subaltern (as woman) speak?, our efforts to give the subaltern a voice in history will be doubly open to the dangers run by Freud's discourse. (emphasis original, 32-33)

'Official European histories' continue to inflect our understandings of gender, race and sex, but reinscribing the gaps, limits and absences in these discourses to reflect those

misrepresented, (whilst acknowledging the power of representation) reorganises their power. Focusing on silence reformulates 'official European histories' and forges a space in those histories in which the voices they have effaced are signified, even if only to register absence.

I read a suggestion in Spivak's writing that asking the question, searching for these voices, constitutes a provision of space that in itself recodes and re-remembers marginalised people as human beings rather than illegitimate historical extras: 'If I ask myself: how is it possible to want to die by fire to mourn a husband ritually, I am asking the question of the (gendered) subaltern woman as subject' (32). Spivak states this position in the context of justifying her specific focus on female subalterns, stressing she is not working to essentialise this gender difference but simply to ask about a life that has been innately gendered. Significantly, however, this imagined question of herself as sati reflects an impetus in reading *for* the subaltern, in order to identify *with* the subaltern, in a way that at least partly evokes that lost subjectivity. In this thesis, I try to put together voices out of the small moments in Conrad's colonial canon in which female characters move and speak with power, agency and desire.

'Partial Hands'

My investment in these textual pockets, pockets that, in all likelihood, do not strike others as they strike me, attests to what Derek Attridge describes as my 'idioculture':

> Each of us inhabits what I have been calling an idioculture, the deposit of our personal history as a participant in a number of ill-defined and often conflicting cultural fields, overlapping with or nested within one another. Any text we read – like any person we encounter – is the product of a unique cultural formation of this kind; the process of reading, therefore, is the process of subjecting the assumptions of the cultural fields that make up my own distinctive idioculture to those which the work embodies (not, of course, as the simple reflex of its time but as it is read in my own time). (2004, 82)

For Attridge, reading is an act of reconciliation between the expectations the reader brings to bear on a text – because of the infinite, unknowable assumptions they have made, the countless meanings attached to a multitude of cultural signs they have brought with them – and the expectations that propelled that text into being. Attridge proposes responsible reading as a balance between these two modalities, between personal impression and historical context: 'I am reading responsibly if I am simultaneously referring the words back to what I know about the various contexts that are relevant [. . .] and referring my own responses to what I am able to access of my own culturally derived ways of thinking and feeling' (2012, 238). Attridge's responsible reading practice allows for our personal interpretations, the things we bring to a text from our own time, our own histories and our own lives, to be an important factor in how we think about a text. He encourages us not to defer to, or even claim, the authority of an imagined originary historical context, but to acknowledge our own cultural baggage as readers.

In this way, Attridge echoes Barthes' argument that 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.' However, where Attridge encourages the identity, or idioculture, of the reader to be a recognisable, valued part of the reading, Barthes values the reader because he believes 'Writing is the neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing' (1322). For Barthes, the reader is the only identifiable subject in the reader/writer exchange, because writing constitutes the loss of identity, the space in which the writing 'subject slips away.' I must note, then, that while I value Attridge's validation of the reader's personal bias, and Barthes' insistence that the reader shapes the text, I have similar, not antithetical, ideas about the writing subject too.

I disagree with Barthes' view that 'the body writing' is lost in writing, and think more in terms of what Laurel Richardson proposes:

> *People who write are always writing about their lives*, even when they disguise this through the omniscient voice of science or scholarship. No writing is untainted by human hands, pure, objective, 'innocent.' The old idea of a strict bifurcation between 'objective' and 'subjective' – between the 'head' and the 'heart' – does not map onto the actual practices through production of knowledge, or knowledge about how knowledge is produced. (emphasis original, 34)

The body writing can never be excised from the work it produces, and never has been, because people 'are always writing about their lives'; even in academia it is always personal, as well as professional, choices that bring us to our subjects. No matter how hard we pretend to speak from a position of objectivity and neutrality, our academic writing is entwined with our own lives. As I write this, I am sat at my kitchen table, on a very hot day at the end of June 2018. One of my dogs is asleep on her bed in the living room, the other one, who we call a puppy though she's nearly a year old, is asleep on the other side of the table. The little yellow cards my partner is using to conceptualise her own thesis are spread out all over the table next to me. This thesis has taken up space in my own life, among the little yellow cards and my lovely sleeping golden retrievers; is it so hard to imagine that my own life has taken up space in my thesis?

Once again, I turn to Ahmed, who always seems to have the words I need. In her introduction to *Wilful Subjects*, she writes about her decision to acknowledge her own relationship with 'wilfulness' in her work: 'In including myself within this text I am, as it were, laying my cards on the table. I am giving you my hand. I have no doubt that some would conclude that my hands cannot be impartial. They are not; and I fully intend this not. I write this book with partial hands. Impartial hands would leave too much untouched' (2014b, 18). There are too many things that have happened over the course of my work, that have changed and chartered that course, that impartial hands would leave untouched. I simply do not have the words to write about the discourse the sticky 'Conradian' sign allows to circulate without writing about my own experiences travelling under that sign. When I have said I am writing a PhD on female characters in Conrad's work, I am met with 'are there even any women in

Conrad?!' When I say I am writing about lesbian desire in Conrad's work, I am warned not to 'see homosexuality where there isn't any!' When I argue Aïssa from *An Outcast of the Islands* is a powerful woman of colour, I am told 'she's not coloured, she's a little bit yellow.'[1] It is this language, this consensus about how we are allowed to speak about Conrad, about the sort of language Conrad studies allows aloud, to which I want to draw attention in my work. These experiences speak to the words this 'cultural air' permits us to turn on each other, but they also testify to the ways the colonial literary canon, and the bodies we imagine occupy it (not female, not lesbian, not of colour), shape our interactions with texts and authors.

In this thesis, I refuse to worry about Conrad's writing body, about how much he was writing about his own life (who knows; who cares). I can only speak to how his work has moved through my world, as his female characters have moved through his books and off the page (onto my laptop screen in a digital archive; onto my bookshelf as a figure on a pulp cover; and onto the screen as the star of a film).

Afterlives

Investing in certain characters as resonant bodies has real-world consequences because characters have real-world capital, as Susan Manning writes: 'The popularity of biographies and the terms of discussion in book clubs remind academics (sometimes to their chagrin) that discussions about the textual marks we call characters "as though" they were "real people" continue to draw readers to literature' (4). Manning's description of character in terms of textual marks evokes the idea that out of one type of character (letters on the page), other types of characters (bodies) accumulate material weight: 'This compound of personification and figuration-in-relation engages the reader in the "reality" of character; the density of tropic associations evokes an illusion of beyond-the-page dimensionality' (Manning, 101). It is this 'beyond-the-page dimensionality' or how a literary character gains access to it, that is at the heart of this thesis. To complement the breathing spaces within the colonial canon, I also explore the afterlives, or 'beyond-the-page dimensionality,' of these characters, the visual, digital, cinematic, publishing spaces in which they *matter*.

I refer to 'afterlives' here because I am excited by the ways these female characters have outlived the author-God who created them, in how they have occupied space since their conception and how they continue to take up space now. By interweaving spaces of reception between the past and the present, I invoke Mieke Bal's thoughts on anachronism:

> Anachronism is inevitable and productive, but also the only way the past can stay or even become alive. Burying the nameless dead of past violence, for example, gives them names and allows survivors to mourn them. Anachronism is also the only way to understand what art from the past offers the present. Even if such anachronistic visions would be unrecognizable to the past artist, their work lends

[1] I return to each of these phrases throughout the thesis and expand on the experiences that surrounded them.

> itself to such 'remaking,' a recharging with energy generated by the encounter between past and present. (185-186)

In popular discourse, anachronism has a bad reputation as the accusation most often levied against the crime of historical inaccuracy. However, as Bal suggests, anachronism also denotes the restorative time-travel capabilities of adaptation – the presence of the new in the old and the old in the new. This transposition is central to how I think about the characters I focus on and how they move outside of the letters on the page. I see them through the codes of my own world (my idioculture) and meet them here as part of today's cultural landscape. As Bal argues, anachronism works to relocate things belonging to different periods in a '"remaking", a recharging' process, which brings me to my decision to turn away from 'Conrad', with all his sticky baggage, and towards the remade, recharged versions of his work.

In his work on 'pulp Conrad', to which I will return in Chapter 4, David M. Earle urges Conrad scholars to interrogate the ways certain publishing formats are elevated and what version of 'Conrad' is constructed from them as a result: 'Breaking away from the academic fetish of an author's first or hardcover appearance divulges a long history of Conrad under covers that are seemingly anathema to the image of Modernist authors as strictly avantgardistes writing, as in Conrad's case, works whose complexity excludes the common reader' (2013, 44). Earle argues that Conrad scholars should stop privileging the versions of Conrad's texts that are packaged in ways that exclude 'the common reader' and instead embrace the 'long history of Conrad under covers' at odds with the sticky 'Conrad' of existential modernist narratives of gloomy white men. When Earle articulates the reasons behind 'the academic fetish of an author's first or hardcover appearance', he also articulates why I want to look elsewhere: 'We privilege manuscripts because they are closer to the aura of authorship, uncontaminated by publishers, copyeditors, and marketing departments. And we privilege first editions because there is less possibility of contamination, and so on down the genealogy of print' (2013, 49). It is this 'possibility of contamination' that animates this project. Here, I turn to the versions of Conrad's texts that have been 'corrupted' by other artists, rendered visually in other formats and screened in other contexts, to explore the different voices and artistic forces that have actuated and 'recharged' his work. It is also this 'possibility of contamination' that I am working towards; another reason I like the term 'afterlives' is because this thesis represents my efforts to imagine what happens to these female characters beyond the narrative tracks Conrad provided for them.

In each of the three sections of this thesis, I write on the breathing spaces and afterlives of the female characters of the 'Lingard trilogy' and how they can change how we construct who the colonial literary canon represents. I take these texts as the structure around which I organise my research because it is representative of Conrad's output, and of the tendencies in Conrad scholarship I am working to redress, as well as the different types of bodies that have been excluded as *Heart of Darkness* has 'become part of the cultural air we breathe'. The trilogy spanned Conrad's writing life, from his first two novels, *Almayer's Folly*

(1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), to *The Rescue* (1920) which was published 4 years before his death. While *An Outcast of the Islands* is a prequel to *Almayer's Folly*, featuring many of the same characters, the events of *The Rescue* take place many decades before the events of both novels, providing a snapshot of Lingard's backstory. In this thesis, however, I follow the trilogy in order of the chronology of the characters, rather than the chronology of Conrad's career, because it is the lives of his characters, rather than the life of the author-God, that interest me.

Starting with *The Rescue*, in Part 1 I focus on the female homoeroticism between Edith Travers, an English aristocrat, and Immada, a Malay princess. To posit a context of lesbian desire in Conrad's works, I also look at the relationship between the young white woman, Freya, and her biracial maid, Antonia, in another of Conrad's Malay texts, 'Freya of the Seven Isles' (1912). In Chapter 1, I present the loaded breathing spaces between each of these female couples that pause the machinery of the patriarchal, colonial, heteronormative romance plots that dominate the texts. From the intimacy between Freya and Antonia, to the intense connection between Edith and Immada, these moments act as textual pockets of lesbianism that have not been acknowledged in traditional Conrad scholarship. In Chapter 2, I examine the materialisation of these characters in the periodical context of their initial publication. The digital archive of Conrad's periodical work, Conrad First, allows me to search for the 'invisible lesbian' – both in terms of how she has been obscured and how she has been made visible – in the illustrations that accompanied *The Rescue* and 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in the early twentieth century British and American magazines in which the texts were first serialised.

In Part 2, I move onto analyse the sexual and cultural representation of Aïssa in *An Outcast of the Islands* and the extent to which she can be described as the text's protagonist. In Chapter 3, I argue that the breathing spaces in the text in which we learn of her background, in which she voices her desire and in which she takes revenge against her lover, all counter the colonial clichés of the white male characters' focalisations, in which she is routinely Othered. In Chapter 4, I explore her depiction on the covers of 1950s and 60s American 'pulp' paperbacks, to examine the ways her racial identity, sexuality and agency are attenuated, but also to propose that, as trojan horse covers, they may have brought her into contact with a readership told to discount her.

In Part 3, I turn to *Almayer's Folly*, to argue in Chapter 5 that it is populated by powerful, articulate women of colour who govern and propel the events of the narrative, and, in Chapter 6, to explore how one of these women, Nina Almayer, materialises on screen in Chantal Akerman's adaptation *La Folie Almayer* (2011). I work in Chapter 5 to move away from the singular female 'pivots' on whom feminist Conrad scholarship has often focused, by presenting a Conrad text that features multiple women, and is indeed driven by the relationships between them. In Chapter 6, I posit that through Aurora Marion's performance of

Nina, Akerman positions this character as the centre of her film, to present a feminist, postcolonial reading of the original text.

In reading outliers of the Conrad canon (according to Bongie and Collits' definitions of 'Conradian') with the explicit intention of hearing female characters, of looking for Freya and Antonia and Edith and Immada and Aïssa and Nina and Taminah and Mrs Almayer, I hope to circulate a different kind of 'cultural air.' By investing in their breathing spaces and traversing their afterlives, I retool the writing of a dead white man to present a colonial literary canon populated by desiring women of colour. They were there then; they are here now.

Part 1: Seeing Homosexuality Where There Isn't Any

I am always a little nervous about declaring my 'gay agenda', the queerness with which I encounter the world around me. I used to worry about my 'partial hands', because I wanted my academic work to pass as impartial, objective, scholarly. It was not that I struggled to identify as gay (although I did, and I do – none of the words have ever felt right; they are not designed to), it was that I feared my ideas would be invalidated by this identification. Every time I raised my theory that there are lesbians in Conrad's work, a theory I believe in, a theory I can back up, part of me always bottled it at the last minute. My voice would always come out more quietly than I anticipated, with slightly less conviction and far too many qualifiers. Sharing something special, private and personal in a space like the academy, which is designed to debate, dispute and debunk, can be horribly exposing. Faced with a blank expression, I might say my chapter on female homoeroticism in Conrad 'isn't like fanfiction,' (even though that's always been exactly what I'm going for – fanfiction writers, especially femslash writers, take tiny moments that mean something to them and stretch them to create the stories they want to see in the world), or that it's different from the queer readings of Conrad that have gone before. But in response, despite (and possibly because of) my desperate justifications, I am still warned not to 'see homosexuality where there isn't any,' to quote one such memorable exchange.

I'd like to say that I've always known what to say in response to such remarks, but it was not until I read Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, in which he writes about queering mass culture, that I finally found the words I need:

> the queerness I point out in mass culture representation and reading in this book is only 'connotative' and therefore deniable or 'insubstantial' as long as we keep thinking within conventional heterocentrist paradigms, which always already have decided that expressions of queerness are *sub*-textual, *sub*-cultural, *alternative* readings, or pathetic and delusional attempts to see something that isn't there – after all mass culture texts are made for the 'average' (straight, white, middle-class, usually male) person, aren't they? I've got news for straight culture: your readings of texts are usually 'alternative' ones for me, and they often seem like desperate attempts to deny the queerness that is so clearly a part of mass culture. (emphasis original, xii)

I have worried that my work would be seen as a 'pathetic and delusional attempt to see something that isn't there', but, as Doty puts it so brilliantly, queer readings only feel forced to those who haven't needed to see them, to those who haven't noticed the force behind the heteronormativity that governs our movements through the world.

I have been in so many spaces where my heterosexuality has been assumed automatically, and my 'queerness' policed as alternative. In familial contexts, my partner and I have been taken to one side and informed that no one minds if we hold hands. In academic contexts, I have sat in a lecture theatre with 200 other students and felt like the only lesbian in

the room, when the lecturer insisted that the poetry of Sappho (who is so famously gay we are literally named after her) belonged to a history of political allegory, not of eroticism between women – as if *that* could ever have a history. From the taxi driver who asked if my partner and I were sisters *or* friends (and then promptly stopped speaking to us when we corrected him), to the decorator who thinks the person with whom I talk about wallpaper so passionately is my mother, to the shop assistant who thought I'd be interested in going on a date with her son (based on the fact that I am young and female), I am always meeting people who insist on 'seeing *heterosexuality* where there isn't any'. Every one of these stories (and there are many, many more) attests to the same point that Doty is making: 'I've got news for straight culture', you are way off.

If 'seeing homosexuality where there isn't any' is all I achieve in the following two chapters, then I will consider myself successful. If I had seen more 'homosexuality where there wasn't any' when I was growing up, even if I had been able to trace the stories I needed to hear in 'unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words' (Woolf, 98) as I do here, then perhaps I wouldn't feel quite so insistent about it now. I'd like not to have to work so hard to show homosexuality is something that can be seen. I'd like it not to register as such a radical idea, particularly given that there is far more textual evidence that bonds Freya and Antonia in 'Freya of the Seven Isles', and Edith and Immada in *The Rescue*, than Kurtz's and 'his mistress' in *Heart of Darkness*. It's often the way that you only think of a great comeback several years after the fact, but if I could go back in time, there are a few people I'd like to say something to: yes, actually 'seeing homosexuality where there isn't any' is exactly what I'm doing. That's the whole point.

<u>Chapter 1:</u> ‘In the Secret’: Queering Relationships Between Women in ‘Freya of the Seven Isles’ and *The Rescue*

In this chapter, I look at the way homosexuality has traditionally been allowed to intersect with Conrad scholarship, and the space lesbianism, in particular, has been permitted to take up within this field of study. I argue that Conrad studies has excluded lesbian desire from the Conrad canon as part of a broader exclusion of his female characters. To counter this critical neglect, I insist that in his writing there are textual moments of female homoeroticism that transcend the hierarchies of heteropatriarchy, race and class that tend to dominate his texts. In my work, I choose to be ‘in the secret’ of what takes place between Freya and Antonia in ‘Freya of the Seven Isles’ (1912), and Edith and Immada in *The Rescue* (1920), by stretching small but significant breathing spaces between these characters to retool Conrad’s Malay fiction and prioritise women who desire women at the centre of the colonial archive.

‘Conradian’ Homosexuality

In 1979, Robert Hodges celebrated the way ‘gay liberation’ had led to a ‘greater willingness to discuss the issue of homosexuality in the life and writings of literary figures’, allowing him to stress the intensity of ‘male-to-male relations’ in Conrad’s work (379-380). Hodges argues that some of Conrad’s portrayals ‘of relations between men suggests a love affair or the solitary yearning of one man for another’ (380). ‘Even more significant’, according to Hodges, ‘is the theme of guilt running throughout Conrad’s work. Conrad’s long gallery of outcast heroes, unable to return home, fearful of exposure, trying to move through life in disguise and profoundly guilty, illustrates an understanding of the psychology of the closet’ (380). For Hodges, the themes of guilt, secrecy and disguise in Conrad’s work are suggestive of an understanding of homosexuality. In Hodges’ formulation, then, homosexuality is a notably negative thing that only happens to male characters; his analysis involves privileging ‘Conrad’s long gallery of outcast heroes’ as protagonists, and nominating male bodies as those that are animated by the important emotional depths in which we as readers should be investing.

In 2008, Richard J. Ruppel also staged homosexuality as central to Conrad’s work in his book *Homosexuality in the Life and Work of Joseph Conrad: Love Between the Lines*. Like Hodges, Ruppel evokes homosexuality in connection with Conrad as something that exclusively affects men. This is more glaring in Ruppel’s work than in Hodges’, as he relies on the same sticky, misogynistic associations attached to Conrad that Susan Jones successfully debunked almost a decade before he was writing. Ruppel writes that Conrad’s

> stilted, insincere-sounding letters of courtship, his awkward and uncomfortable honeymoon, his unaffectionate, frequently dismissive references to his wife Jessie, the unconvincing representations of women and, especially, heterosexual relationships in his fiction, and his exclusion of women readers from his intended audience in the

> first part of his career might all be explained quite simply by that familiar phrase; [. . .] he was a 'man's man.'
>
> But Conrad's distance from women – there are times when, reading his letters and fiction, they seem members of a *different species* – was matched by an intimacy with men that transcended what Eve Sedgwick defines as the homosocial [. . .] (emphasis added, 1)

Ruppel justifies looking at homosexuality in relation to Conrad because of what he sees as the author's discomfort with women in his life and his fiction. Crucially, Ruppel's framework depends on presenting Conrad's female characters as 'unconvincing' as characters and unidentifiable as human.

However, Jones persuasively repudiated the preconceptions Ruppel deploys here:

> [Conrad] was not altogether the lonely seaman uncomfortable in female company, but rather a sympathetic interpreter of women's contemporary situation. His relationship to women, to his women characters, and his women readers was at times difficult, challenging but nevertheless one that initiated an astute, though largely unrecognised, exploration of female identity in the fiction. (2001, 2)

Given Conrad's repeated focus on gender identity and female experience in his writing, Jones stresses that the traditional 'distant-from-women' version of Conrad is not based on his fiction, but on the scholarship that has surrounded it. Writing of the literary critic Graham Hough's inane contention that 'very few women really enjoy Conrad' because 'the women's world play[s] such a very small part in Conrad's work' (qtd. in Jones 2001, 7), Jones articulates the way Conrad's female characters have traditionally been treated in Conrad scholarship: 'The presence of women characters in Conrad's novels has caused the greatest difficulties for such critics [as Hough]. Even by the 1980s some commentators could only account for Conrad's inclusion of female roles in his novels by referring to the author's commodification of them' (2001, 7). Jones shows that the attitudes Hough exemplified have had a lasting impact on Conrad studies, constructing and reinforcing a version of the author that was 'not for girls', through the fallacy that Conrad did not write about women. Jones reflects on the fact that, when they are recognised at all, female characters have conventionally only been allowed to materialise in Conrad criticism in relation to the way Conrad commodifies them. This means they perpetually occupy object roles in the scholarship, rather than being read as characters in their own right.

I will return to the casual misogyny of Conrad scholarship in Chapter 5, but here I draw attention to Jones' work because the objectification she describes of Hough and of literary criticism of the 1980s is just as redolent of the way Ruppel treats Conrad's female characters in 2008. Ruppel's focus on homosexuality involves a subordination and dismissal of female characters: *'Lord Jim*'s first central intimacy is between Marlow and Jim, but in the second half this is complicated by the introduction of Jewel, Marlow's rival and Jim's paramour' (6). In order to propose a 'central intimacy' between men, Ruppel chooses to prioritise white male characters as subjects, at the expense of female characters who are positioned as erotic objects or 'paramours.' This is one example of the way Ruppel forecloses a reading that queers

Conrad characters from coinciding with one that sees women as subjects. In order to privilege homosexuality as an object of knowledge worthy of academic attention within Conrad scholarship, Ruppel utilises the traditional assumption that women in Conrad (both female characters and the female readers who relate to them) are a 'different species.'

However, the way he writes about homosexuality as an object worth scholarly discussion also excludes anyone who identifies as gay from the world of Conrad criticism. Ruppel employs a lexicon that distinguishes a strictly heterosexual 'we' of Conrad scholarship: 'It's unlikely *we* will ever know whether Conrad himself was what *we* would now call a practicing homosexual – whether he had physical, sexual relationships with other men. But I hope to prove that he was imaginatively, if not physically, bisexual' (emphasis added, 2). By denying it as a possible outcome of his research, Ruppel implies that the real question he wants to answer is who Conrad wanted to have sex with. Ruppel frames his question of how homosexuality relates to Conrad as one of whether Conrad himself was gay, which, I would argue, serves neither Conrad nor contemporary readers.

When I first read Ruppel's book, I was excited to see how something relevant to my life would intersect with something else that was relevant in my life. I had found myself in Conrad's work and I thought I might see that reflected in Ruppel's writing too. Instead I found another example of a straightening world, as gay people become mythical 'practicing homosexuals', who are different, separate and foreign to the 'we' that names them. Ruppel proposes that, despite not being able to prove that Conrad desired men with biographical evidence (or in Ruppel's words, that he was 'physically bisexual'), he can show Conrad's awareness of same-sex desire, or his 'imaginative bisexuality', with literary evidence. But if 'imaginatively bisexual' only denotes the presence of same-sex desire in Conrad's work, would it not be more appropriate to think of it as simply 'not homophobic'. In Ruppel's writing, Conrad studies becomes a space in which it is normal not to recognise same-sex desire, but an extreme endorsement or exceptional level of identification, a sign of 'imaginative bisexuality', to acknowledge it. Here the dead white man can only not also be straight in a scandalous way. To be a worthy object of study in this sphere, Ruppel suggests, homosexuality needs the delineated 'homosexual' to remain its *object*, the far away specimen that is emphatically not-one-of-us.

Ruppel goes on to apply the distinct 'we' of a heteropatriarchal scholarly voice, as he continues: 'What *we* would now call "homosexual subcultures" existed prior to the nineteenth century, and, as far as *we* know, individuals have enjoyed sexual intimacy with members of the same gender throughout history, but the designations of "heterosexual" and "homosexual" – which now appear to define an individual as profoundly as gender – are new phenomena' (emphasis added, 3). This second 'what we would now call,' prefixing another ambiguously overladen classification, further positions homosexuality as a mysterious sub-category around which Others gather in spaces and move in ways that this 'we' couldn't possibly bring itself to

describe. Ruppel's use of 'as far as *we* know,' when resignedly acknowledging that same-sex desire has a legitimate presence in history has the effect of undermining this acknowledgement, as if to say '*we* have no way of knowing if same-sex desire has ever existed,' because the 'we' he delineates would not intersect with such 'subcultures'. Ruppel's statement that sexuality 'now appears to define an individual as profoundly as gender' is a problem because neither sexuality nor gender are innate identifiers for everyone. For those people who do identify through sexuality and/or gender, they may be told here that their sexual identity is not registered in the limited binary Ruppel lists, or if it is that their identification is a type of 'new phenomena', not traditional, not quite valid, a passing fancy.

Ruppel's language may be read as careless word choice, but for me it is this carelessness that is the issue because it presupposes a readership that is not affected by these words. Ruppel's writing is a decade old now, so again my criticism might be read as disproportionate given the changing standards of our social lexicon. For context, then, I offer the work of Leila J. Rupp from 2009. Rupp writes with a much greater consideration for terminology, as if she is speaking to readers who are impacted by the words she chooses: 'I have named this book *Sapphistries*, an invented word, although not an entirely original one, to embrace all the diverse manifestations of women and "social males" with women's bodies who desired, loved, made love to, formed relationships with, and married other women' (1). Where Ruppel seems to write for Conrad scholars as a putatively heterosexual group, Rupp appears to be writing with women who desire women in mind. She demarcates the scope of her study in flexible, inclusive, expansive ways that speak to same-sex desire as a valid, energizing, positive experience, as opposed to the salaciousness implied by Ruppel's writing.

Rupp is particularly careful when discussing sexual and gender identities, such as when she explains her decision to include relationships involving 'female-bodied individuals who did not or do not consider themselves women' under the banner of 'a history of love between women' (5). Rupp writes that

> Because we often do not know what such individuals themselves thought about their gender and sexuality, and because the act of female bodies having sex together was often what the authorities saw as most important, I include them here, being careful not to assume either that they were transgendered in a contemporary sense or that they were like female-gendered women who desired or had sex with other female-gendered women. (5)

Rupp is cautious not to attribute gender identities to bodies that have been gendered female, reflecting and acknowledging an awareness of the distinctions between bodies and the people who inhabit them. In writing in this way, Rupp allows for a multiplicity of gender identities to occupy her work. She does this while also being alert to the potential misrepresentation that would be involved in using anachronistic identity categories, without delegitimising those categories as 'new phenomena' (Ruppel, 3).

Meanwhile, Ruppel's concern about anachronism is part of a broader appeal to an authenticating scientific discourse. He qualifies his contention that Conrad was himself 'imaginatively, if not physically, bisexual' by stating

> I hope most readers will examine my claim in the same way they might think of a scientific hypothesis. When scientists speak of an elegant hypothesis, they mean that that explanation for a particular physical phenomenon is the most simple, and it explains the most features of that phenomenon. I believe this is true of my claim about Conrad's sexual orientation. It explains a great deal of Conrad's life story, and it clarifies important passages in his work.
>
> When I suggest that Conrad's fiction contains expressions of potential and actual homosexual desire, I am using contemporary and, therefore, slightly anachronistic terms. It would be ahistorical to describe any of Conrad's male characters – Marlow or the Harlequin in *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator of *Under Western Eyes*, the captain/narrator of 'The Secret Sharer,' Dr. Kennedy in 'Amy Foster,' and the other characters whose ambivalent sexuality is discussed in this book – as 'gay.' (4-5)

Ruppel further delineates the homosexual as an object-body that is squarely outside the realm of Conrad studies, as his investigation of homosexuality in the *life* of Joseph Conrad is positioned as scientific enquiry, while his investigation of homosexuality in the *work* of Joseph Conrad regards characters with 'ambivalent sexuality' who cannot be associated with the contemporary ('new') sign 'gay.' Even the word 'gay' must be kept apart from Conrad, bracketed off and secured in protective quotation marks. Ruppel is clear here: this study is not about finding people who identify as gay, and who have been traditionally denied historical legitimacy, in this archive; it is about 'explain[ing] a great deal of Conrad's life story', using scientific research terms and paradigms.

In justifying his focus on homosexuality in terms of science, Ruppel echoes Havelock Ellis in his preface to *Sexual Inversion*, when Ellis writes 'If I had not been able to present new facts in what is perhaps a new light, I should not feel justified in approaching the subject of sexual inversion at all' (Ellis, vii). Appealing to the authority of a 'scientific hypothesis' to discuss homosexuality, Ruppel evokes Ellis' justification of 'approaching the subject of sexual inversion' only because of the 'new facts' he wants to present. Both men suggest homosexuality can only be described in a medical discourse that protects the normative reading subject from the threat of its contagion.

Diana Collecott argues Ellis' 'new facts' disclaimer shows him 'demur[ing] to the "normal" (heterosexual male) reader' (237), a concession that offers a security that she is denied:

> It is tempting to imitate this doctor's presumption of objectivity and to write here as an academic, concealing my other identities as a woman and a lesbian. Yet it is as a subject conscious of the discontinuities between these positions that I write. Should my text try to 'pass' as a 'straight' essay, or turn in on itself, using deliberate word-play to subvert the pre-Freudian norms of academic discourse? (237)

Unlike Ellis, Collecott is not afforded the luxury of being able to disappear into the discourse that keeps the homosexual at bay, as a distant, contained specimen, to be analysed under the normative gaze of the straight white male body. More than this, Collecott rejects such a concealment, choosing instead to eloquently speak from the subject spaces that make Ellis' language inaccessible for her. Just as Collecott deals with Ellis' exclusionary academic practice by refusing to be excluded, I choose to counter Ruppel's 'we' by writing instead 'with partial hands' (Ahmed 2014b, 18), from the discontinuities between my positions as 'a practising homosexual' and 'a practising Conradian.'

Mrs Fyne

When Ruppel and Hodges do fleetingly acknowledge lesbianism, it becomes even clearer that women as characters and readers do not register as part of the broad remits that their respective titles would imply. In *Homosexuality in the Life and Work of Joseph Conrad*, lesbianism (and by extension the idea that women can be desiring subjects at the centre of cultural representations of love or sexuality) is quite literally a footnote.

When Ruppel contends in his reading of *Heart of Darkness* that 'the two main female characters that make up the poles of the continuum along which Kurtz moves – the Intended and the African Mistress – are both identified exclusively through their potentially sexual and sexual relationship to Kurtz' (32), he qualifies this with the following footnote: 'As in most adventure fiction, the women in *Heart of Darkness* are presented (and valued) exclusively in their relationships with men. Homosexuality in the novel is therefore exclusively between men; lesbian homoeroticism is almost unthinkable in this sexual economy' (97). Ruppel argues that because the female characters of *Heart of Darkness* are defined in relation to men, lesbian sexuality is unthinkable. I will return to this idea that patriarchal sexual economies preclude relationships between women when I discuss the work of Sharon Marcus later in the chapter, but for now I want to dissect Ruppel's use of the word 'unthinkable' to describe lesbianism here. It is entirely probable that he is simply explaining that patriarchal sexual economies prohibit lesbian relationships (by prohibiting sexually active women), or make them invisible or unlikely to take place. Yet 'unthinkable', while conveying these things, adds another dimension: 'we will not think about this here'.

Indeed, lesbianism only surfaces as a 'thinkable' entity one more time in Ruppel's book, in another footnote relating to his reading of *Chance*. This example is the most revealing and representative in terms of how lesbianism has been allowed to appear in Conrad scholarship, as he writes about Mrs Fyne, Conrad scholarship's token lesbian. Because of this, I will quote the entirety of Ruppel's consideration of Mrs Fyne, including his textual examples:

> Marlow aside, however, there are two homosocially charged arenas in the novel: the lesbian-toned circle around Mrs. Fyne, the radical feminist, and Captain Anthony's ship, the *Ferndale*, before Flora

> comes aboard. Several readers have noticed the coterie of young women who surround Mrs. Fyne, described by Marlow in this way:
>
> > The girl-friend problem exercised me greatly. How and where the Fynes got all these pretty creatures to come and stay with them I can't imagine. I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. But I soon discovered that he could hardly tell one from the other, though obviously their presence met with his solemn approval. These girls in fact came for Mrs. Fyne. They treated her with admiring deference. She answered to some need of theirs. They sat at her feet. They were like disciples. It was very curious. Of Fyne they took but scanty notice. As to myself I was made to feel that I did not exist.
>
> Mrs. Fyne's 'atrocious' feminism, which insists that women can be unscrupulous in seeking their way in a man's world, draws these young women, and they create a world apart from men that her husband guards and naively celebrates: 'he looked on, acquiesced, approved'. (Ruppel, 76)

The footnote that accompanies this passage reads as follows:

> This book is concerned with male homosexuality, so Conrad's representation of Mrs. Fyne and her admiring circle of young women is beyond its scope. But more could certainly be made of them. Mrs. Fyne is obviously a hypocrite – suggesting that women's oppression gives them license to be unscrupulous in the pursuit of the satisfaction of their needs while, at the same time, opposing Flora's efforts to marry Mrs. Fyne's brother. Still, as [Andrew Michael] Roberts points out, Marlow expresses some appreciation of the difficulties women face in a patriarchy, and Mrs. Fyne's *radical* feminist position (which Marlow calls 'naive atrociousness') is partly born out in the narrative. Her exclusion of men from her circle (except for the overawed and obedient Fyne) counterbalances Marlow's misogyny. (emphasis added, 102-103)

Aside from Ruppel's citations (which I have omitted to avoid a tangle of contradictory page references), this passage and footnote, as well as the *Heart of Darkness* footnote quoted above, constitute the entirety of his discussion of lesbianism. Ruppel positions lesbianism as a footnote to the apparently more important subject of homosexuality between men.

Where Ruppel's contentions for homosexuality in Conrad's fiction manifesting between male characters revolve around intimacy and attraction, his work on Mrs Fyne focuses on politics; in other words, homosexual identity is defined for men as something erotic, rooted in desires that animate bodies, whereas the lesbian object is nominated for Ruppel because of the word 'girl-friend', and what he describes as a 'radical' feminism that he sees as a form of 'hypocrisy'. In Ruppel's reading, desire is not something experienced by female bodies, implying that women are not subjects, but only objects, of desire. His suggestion that 'more could certainly be made of' Mrs Fyne's 'girl-friends' insinuates that lesbianism does not reside as an underlying theme within the text at all, but rather something that must be twisted

out of it, so that he once again infers that lesbianism is not a valid object of study for Conrad scholarship. Perhaps the reason something must be 'made of' Mrs Fyne's lesbian credentials in the text, is because the text does not actually provide them.

I have included Ruppel's textual examples here to reflect the meagre evidence he calls upon to describe Mrs Fyne's feminist reading group as a 'lesbian-toned circle.' It is the same evidence Hodges relies on to similarly nominate Mrs Fyne as the token lesbian of his study. Again, I quote the entirety of Hodges' discussion of lesbianism in Conrad's work, including textual examples:

> Though he depicts her as married and the mother of several children, Conrad hints frequently that Mrs. Fyne is lesbian. He ascribes to her a number of stereotypically lesbian characteristics and contrasts these with qualities he thinks appropriate for a woman. Mrs Fyne is introduced as habitually wearing '*blouses with a starched front* like a man's shirt, a stand-up collar and a long neck-tie.' Conrad describes her emotional nature as unfeminine. 'A something which was not coldness, not yet indifference, but a sort of peculiar self-possession gave her the appearance of a very capable and excellent governess; as if Fyne were a widower and the children not her own, but only entrusted to her calm, efficient, unemotional care.' Conrad repeats the governess image several times. Mrs Fyne is, of course, an ardent 'feminist' and is supposed to be writing a 'handbook for women with grievances'. This book will teach women how to take advantage of men *unscrupulously*. She surrounds herself with young female disciples who are repeatedly referred to as 'girl-friends.' Flora, the traditionally feminine heroine of the story, is temporarily enrolled among the girl-friends, but when she falls in love with Mrs. Fyne's brother, her benefactress turns hostile. She 'did not want women to be women. Her theory was that they should turn themselves into *unscrupulous* sexless nuisances'. In part an ill-focused reaction to the 'feminist' movement of the time, Conrad's portrayal of Mrs. Fyne is crude, an exploitation of a denigrating stereotype. As such it has communicated its message. In his 1960 biography of Conrad, Jocelyn Baines comments on the character: 'Conrad never states that she is a lesbian, although she is given *all the lesbian's most distinctive characteristics.* Whether he intended her to be taken for a lesbian is difficult to say.' (emphases added, 386)

Like Ruppel, Hodges identifies Mrs. Fyne as a lesbian because of feminist politics he also sees as extreme; where Ruppel calls her feminism 'radical', Hodges opts for 'ardent.' Citing Baines here, 'all the lesbian's most distinctive characteristics' become a starched blouse, a governess-like demeanour and a lack of scruples. In arguing that the 'denigrating stereotype' of Mrs. Fyne's representation as a lesbian is merely a symptom of Conrad's homophobia, while also perpetuating the homophobic stereotype that equates 'unfeminine' with lesbian, Hodges, like Ruppel, uses Conrad's supposed use of offensive language as an excuse to use offensive language himself. It is not Conrad who describes Mrs. Fyne as a lesbian, it is Hodges who takes lesbianism to mean the wrong kind of clothes on the body of a woman, rather than any kind of attraction or desire between women.

Both Hodges and Ruppel choose to uncritically view Mrs. Fyne as Marlow, one of the most infamously unreliable narrators in literary history, views her. More than this, they conflate

Marlow's views with Conrad's. Returning to their textual examples, a closer look at the extended passage Ruppel quotes, to which Hodges also refers, makes it clear that they both choose to accept Marlow's biased narration at face value. Both critics become as unstuck as Marlow by the term 'girl-friend', as if that word has ever operated as a stable marker of female homoeroticism; there is no stable marker for homoerotic relationships between women because lesbianism is something that must be questioned and denied at every opportunity by a heteropatriarchal world that relies on it being 'unthinkable'. Moreover, neither Hodges nor Ruppel pick up on Marlow's jealousy at being 'made to feel that [he] did not exist' (C, 35), because the women he leers at as 'pretty creatures' are paying more attention to Mrs. Fyne than to him. Instead, they nominate lesbianism in this passage, perpetuating the cliché that if women aren't interested in a man it must be because they aren't attracted to men, rather than that that man is simply uninteresting (God Forbid!). Indeed, Marlow does not actually detail Mrs. Fyne's attraction to these women at any point, but instead describes the attention they bestow on her – 'These girls in fact came for Mrs Fyne' (C, 35) – and what they come to her for does not sound sexual, but spiritual; 'disciples' sitting at her feet who 'treated her with admiring deference' (C, 35).

In their readings of Mrs Fyne's supposed lesbianism, neither Ruppel nor Hodges point to the textual evidence that might actually suggest intimacy between women: 'Mrs Fyne would be gone to the bottom of the garden with the girl-friend of the week. She always walked off directly after tea with her arm round the girl-friend's waist' (C, 35). That neither critic deems bodily contact between women, suggestive of sexual attraction, as a 'characteristic' of lesbianism further indicates that in heteropatriarchal scholarship female desire is irrelevant. In this discourse, 'lesbian' is apparently only useful to denote women who are either unobtainable or 'unscrupulous.'

By signifying 'lesbian' as 'not attract*ive* to men,' instead of 'not attract*ed* to men', female sexuality is safely circumscribed back into the dominion of choices made by men. As Adrianne Rich writes, 'Heterosexuality as an institution has [. . .] drowned in silence the erotic feelings between women' (190). Instead of contending that Mrs. Fyne is a lesbian because she is attracted to women, because she '*always* walked off directly after tea with her arm round the girl-friend's waist' (emphasis added, C, 35), Ruppel and Hodges use her dissenting views on gender politics to brand her sexually dissident. When they describe her as a 'lesbian', it is meant as an insult.

It is also telling that they position her politics as dissident in the first place, as Marlow's hyperbolic contempt for her handbook is more indicative of the extremes of *his* misogyny, than *her* apparent 'radical' or 'ardent' misandry:

> It was a knock-me-down doctrine – a practical individualistic doctrine. You would not thank me for expounding it to you at large. Indeed I think that she herself did not enlighten me fully. There must have been things not fit for a man to hear. But shortly, and as far as my bewilderment allowed me to grasp its naïve atrociousness, it was

> something like this: that no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman (who by the mere fact of her sex was the predestined victim of conditions created by men's selfish passions, their vices and their abominable tyranny) from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence. (C, 47)

Marlow argues that it is more important for women to be 'delicate' than able to 'exist easily'; Mrs. Fyne's view that women might be allowed to be happy, rather than make men happy, doesn't seem particularly extreme by today's standards, yet both Hodges and Ruppel see this viewpoint as emblematic of her aberrance. Mrs. Fyne's 'doctrine' is clearly both 'radical' and 'ardent' for Marlow, and possibly even for the novel's first readers, but that does not mean that this description needs to go unchallenged, or even be recirculated by contemporary scholarship. Describing the idea that women secure for themselves 'the easiest possible existence' as a 'radical feminist position,' without qualifying that this is the view of a virulently misogynist character who represents an entirely different social space from which we are reading, risks feeding into enduring anti-feminist discourses that position women's rights as extreme demands. Writing about Conrad does not exempt literary critics from writing in our own time; they are accountable by the codes that shape our social contract, not those of the time in which Conrad was writing.

Being 'Writerly'

The insistence of Hodges and Ruppel that 'Conradian' homosexuality occurs exclusively between men resonates with Collecott's argument, from 1990, that 'The male body dominates current discussion in gay studies, while the female body is doubly deleted: is deleted as a maternal body, and as both subject and object of lesbian desire' (238). When homosexuality is presented as something that happens to and between male bodies, Collecott contends, female bodies disappear from the conversation, as both heteropatriachal objects and queer subjects. Collecott argues 'This situation leaves the lesbian conscious of herself as an absence from discourse' (238). This resonates with my own feelings of exclusion when discovering the very limited, very compromised space lesbianism has been allowed to take up as a subject of Conrad scholarship.

For Collecott, this absence is remedied by focusing on silences and gaps. She turns to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, in which she contends 'Woolf identifies the task of articulating lesbian desire as one that involves re-reading, as well as writing in previously unknown ways' (238). Collecott traces in Woolf a lineage of lesbian recognition that begins as a literary practice. Woolf posits that the secret that 'Chloe likes Olivia' manifests in 'unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words [. . .] the shortest of shorthand, in words that are hardly syllabled yet' (98). This idea that there is a lack of words for the articulation of lesbian desire and a lack of space in which to speak it, that we must rely on 'unrecorded gestures' and 'the shortest of shorthand', is echoed by Rich when she argues, 'Women's love for women has been represented almost entirely through silence and lies' (190). Bringing 'women's love for

women' out of the shadows, then, requires a reader who is ready to decode those 'hardly syllabled' words.

While Collecott has called for a 'revision of reading practices' (249), Marilyn Farwell – asking 'if it is possible for a text to contain a lesbian theme without clearly identifiable lesbian characters or a lesbian author' – suggests 'the reader might become the locus of the lesbian in the lesbian text' (7). In the face of our 'absence from the discourse', we can choose to be 'the locus of the lesbian in the lesbian text' – we can find ourselves within the gaps because we can construct our own narratives out of 'half-said words', 'silence and lies.' Sally Munt nicely sums up what is at stake in the reading practices of the lesbian reader when she constructs lesbian culture as '*writerly*': 'we are particularly adept at extracting our own meanings, at highlighting a text's latent content, at reading "dialectically", at filling the gaps, at interpreting the narrative according to our introjected fictional fantasies, and at foregrounding the intertextuality of our identities' (xxi). The lesbian reader, Munt suggests, in order to find herself in the text, must deploy a series of reading strategies that rely on intertextuality, imagination and invention.

These choices, to see homosexuality where there isn't any (and *because* there isn't any), transform texts, as Jodie Medd attests when she contends 'what qualifies as lesbian literature is often a matter of [. . .] not just what we read, but how we read. As Prof. V. would suggest when I was an undergraduate, if we "put on our lesbian reading glasses," even familiar texts come into another kind of focus. [. . .] The question of lesbian literature is, foremost, a question of reading practices' (2015, 8). Finding 'the locus of the lesbian,' as Farwell calls it, in a text that is seemingly devoid of such content, comes down to a decision of how to read, what to look out for, which moments to privilege, and which characters to invest in. And it is necessary 'to make more of' certain narratives, as Ruppel would say, to actively decide that women who desire women are part of even the most closed-off, supposedly masculine, heterosexual cultural archives, because unless we make an effort to think about it in these contexts, lesbianism can and will always be contained and controlled as 'unthinkable' in every context. When I 'put on my lesbian reading glasses', I see a lot more lesbianism in Conrad than a married woman wearing a starched blouse.

Freya and Antonia

'Freya of the Seven Isles' tells the story of a young woman, living with her father, Nelson, 'an unassuming Dane' and retired trader in the Malay Archipelago; 'there was no nook or cranny of these tropical waters that the enterprise of old Nelson [. . .] had not penetrated' (FSI, 127), before he bought or leased 'a little group called the Seven Isles, not far north of Banka' (FSI, 128). He spends his retirement negotiating his anxiety with 'the authorities', the Spanish and Dutch colonial forces, but not the English whom 'he trusted and respected' (FSI, 127). Freya is described as 'the kind of a girl one remembers' (FSI, 128-9) for her beauty and grace, but

more significantly for me, she is as well-travelled and adventurous as any of the male characters. The narrator tells us, 'I don't know whether she was actually born at sea, but I do know that up to twelve years of age she sailed about with her parents in various ships' (FSI, 129).

Over the course of the narrative she finds herself in an uncomfortable and aggressive love-triangle. Vying for her affections are Jaspar Allen, an English Captain (considered 'too enterprising in his trading' by the Dutch colonial forces, and therefore 'not a desirable acquaintance' (FSI, 133) by Freya's father) and Lieutenant Heemskirk, a Dutch naval officer and gunboat commander, a member of those authorities Freya's father is so anxious to please. Freya and Jaspar are presented as star-crossed lovers thwarted by Heemskirk's lascivious interest in Freya. While Freya's father will not permit their match, insisting that she ought to appease Heemskirk, they plot to elope on her twenty-first birthday and travel the oceans on Jaspar's boat.

I choose to find resonance not in Freya's interactions with these men, or her father, though their machinations dominate the plot, but in her relationship with her maid, Antonia. In the racial and class hierarchies of the house, Antonia is an ambivalent presence, introduced when she appears to the narrator as a startling 'draped feminine figure' materializing from 'the shadows of boulders and bushes':

> it occurred to me that it could be no one else but Freya's maid, a half-caste Malacca Portuguese. One caught fleeting glimpses of her olive face and dazzling white teeth about the house. I had observed her at times from a distance, as she sat within call under the shade of some fruit trees, brushing and plaiting her long raven locks. It seemed to be the principal occupation of her leisure hours. We had often exchanged nods and smiles – and a few words, too. She was a pretty creature. (FSI, 152)

That the only woman in the text who is not white is visible to the English narrator as nothing more than a glimpse of white teeth, manifesting as 'a pretty creature', occupied entirely by her appearance (her 'raven locks' coded as non-white), and always situated in relation to her work ('within call'), reflects the way her character is positioned in the patriarchal social structure of the text.

Yet there are suggestions that the way Freya sees her transcends the racial, class-inflected roles the narrator prescribes for her. Firstly, while the rest of the invisible workforce are signified only as the consumers of the rice Nelson buys from Jaspar to 'feed his workpeople on' (FSI, 155), Antonia occupies a distinct role as the only named staff-member in the household: 'Presently the Tamil boy, who was Nelson's head servant, came in with the lights. She [Freya] addressed him at once with voluble directions where to put the lamps, told him to bring the tray with the gin and bitters, and to send Antonia into the house' (FSI, 158). This small scene in which Freya 'volubly' directs her father's nameless head servant, demarcates the social roles of Freya as mistress, 'the Tamil boy' as servant, and Antonia as somewhere in-between them. While she is called forth as an entity for 'the Tamil boy' to deliver, like the

drinks, she is also explicitly named by Freya in a way that undermines the distinctions that have just been erected. Without the narrator's earlier dismissal of Antonia as the 'half-caste' maid, she could be read in this sequence as a guest, a friend or relative called upon by Freya.

The most potent example of Antonia's ambiguously elevated status in Freya's world is the suggestion that she is in her mistress' confidences, helping her plot her escape with Jaspar at the beginning of the text: 'I understood (from Jasper) that *she was in the secret*, like a comedy camerista. She was to accompany Freya on her irregular way to matrimony and "ever after" happiness' (emphasis added, FSI, 152). Though Antonia's position 'in the secret' is decided by the male narrator and Jaspar, and it is ostensibly a secret defined by patriarchal and colonial rivalries (the secret of which man Freya will marry, the Dutch colonizer or the English one), it evokes a powerful intimacy between the two women. One woman shares her transgressive, forbidden, personal desires with another, and intends to include her in their actualisation. There is even a startling possibility that it might be Freya and Antonia marrying, in the description of Antonia 'accompanying' Freya to 'irregular [. . .] matrimony.'

If Antonia is 'in the secret' of which man Freya hopes to marry, she is also 'in the secret' of which man repulses her. When keeping watch so that Freya and Jaspar can meet in secret, Antonia is attacked by Heemskirk, in a way that reinstates her denigrated social position as a non-white servant:

> She bounded aside like a startled fawn, but Heemskirk, with a lucid comprehension of what she was there for, pounced upon her, and, catching her arm, clapped his other thick hand over her mouth.
>
> 'If you try to make a noise I'll twist your neck!'
>
> This ferocious figure of speech terrified the girl sufficiently. Heemskirk had seen plainly enough on the verandah Freya's golden head with another head very close to it. He dragged the unresisting maid with him by a circuitous way into the compound, where he dismissed her with a vicious push in the direction of the cluster of bamboo huts for the servants.
>
> She was very much like the faithful camerista of Italian comedy, but in her terror she bolted away without a sound from that thick, short, black-eyed man with a cruel grip of fingers like a vice. Quaking all over at a distance, extremely scared and half inclined to laugh, she saw him enter the house at the back. (FSI, 157)

Heemskirk's violent jealousy positions Antonia as a conduit for Freya; he threatens, intimidates and assaults Antonia because, when he sees her 'keeping watch,' she represents the sexual relationship between Freya and Jaspar. This association, this slippage between Antonia and Freya, where the former's presence comes to act as a sign of the latter's sexuality, further underlines Antonia's connection to the relationship between Freya and Jaspar. She is punishable in this instance, made to stand for her mistress' putatively wayward sexuality, because she is lowly in Heemskirk's eyes. He enforces the social class boundary between Freya and Antonia by attenuating the latter's role as 'comedy camerista.'

Her position 'in the secret' is circumscribed, as her knowledge of Freya's secret desires for a man endangers her, making her vulnerable to violence and abuse, because

unlike Freya, she can be wrestled back to the servants' quarters, with the 'Tamil boys' (FSI, 159), and moved outside the plot of the white European players. Heemskirk's gendered violence towards Antonia is also an act of racial and social control, as his patriarchal policing of the unruly sexuality of the middle class white woman is enacted on the body of the lower-class woman of colour. Antonia's inclination to laugh at his retreating figure could thus be read as an act of resistance to this repositioning. She reclaims her position 'in the secret'; this time it is the secret of Freya's mockery of Heemskirk, one that casts him as grotesque and ridiculous, even at his most powerful.

Freya is equally disposed to laugh when Antonia shares the incident with her. While the exchange works to emphasize the connection between the women, placing them against Heemskirk, resisting him together and in the same way, Antonia's sharing also undercuts the racial and social divisions between them that Heemskirk worked to reinforce. Antonia confides in Freya as a friend, rather than confessing to her mistress as a servant; she is confident in Freya's compassion and understanding:

> But Antonia, still scared and hysterical, exhibited a bruise on her arm which roused Freya's indignation.
>
> 'He jumped on me out of the bush like a tiger,' said the girl, laughing nervously with frightened eyes.
>
> 'The brute!' thought Freya. 'He meant to spy on us, then.' She was enraged, but the recollection of the thick Dutchman in white trousers wide at the hips and narrow at the ankles, with his shoulder-straps and black bullet head, glaring at her in the light of the lamps, was so repulsively comical that she could not help a smiling grimace. Then she became anxious. The absurdities of three men were forcing this anxiety upon her: Jasper's impetuosity, her father's fears, Heemskirk's infatuation. (FSI, 160)

Antonia's sharing provokes indignation and rage from Freya, which in turn becomes repulsion, derision and 'a smiling grimace', and finally frustration with the wider patriarchal machinations surrounding her. This progression suggests that she reads the violence of Heemskirk's desire on the surface of Antonia's skin as a symbol of the broader workings of male control from her father and prospective husband. Her relationship with Antonia is separate from those frustrations for Freya. Their secret sharing constitutes an intimate space away from the patriarchal, colonial, social mechanisms that demarcate their separate spheres and trajectories.

Later in the narrative, defending herself from a predatory sexual assault from Heemskirk, when he forces himself upon her – '"You don't mean to say a kiss frightens you so much as all that . . . I know better . . . I don't mean to be left out in the cold"' (FSI, 167) – Freya hits him, an act she frames as revenge for his attack on Antonia. Afterwards, in the intimate quarters of their bedroom, shared laughter overrides the formal constraints of the maid/mistress dynamic and signifies further sharing of fears and desires for the future:

> Antonia, in her corner, moaned and giggled, and it was impossible to tell where the moans ended and the giggles began.
>
> The mistress and the maid had been somewhat hysterical, for

> Freya, on fleeing into her room, had found Antonia there, and had told her everything.
>
> *'I have avenged you, my girl,'* she exclaimed.
>
> And then they had laughingly cried and cryingly laughed with admonitions – 'Ssh, not so loud! Be quiet!' on one part, and interludes of 'I am so frightened . . . He's an evil man,' on the other. [. . .]
>
> In the dimness of the room, with only a nightlight burning at the head of Freya's bed, the camerista crept out of her corner to crouch at the feet of her mistress, supplicating in whispers:
>
> 'There's the brig. Captain Allen. Let us run away at once — oh, let us run away! I am so frightened. Let us! Let us!'
>
> 'I! Run away!' *thought Freya to herself*, without looking down at the scared girl. 'Never.' Both the resolute mistress under the mosquito-net and the frightened maid lying curled up on a mat at the foot of the bed did not sleep very well that night. (emphases added, FSI, 171-172)

Antonia sees Jaspar Allen as the key to a peaceful future with Freya, away from the tyranny of Heemskirk and Freya's father. In amongst this toxic atmosphere of patriarchal plotting and colonial anxiety, we are presented with a moment of quiet, rebellious female intimacy, crossing race and class lines, a breathing space in which one woman asks another to run away with her.

That this proposal takes the form of a heteronormative elopement plot does not necessarily preclude this possibility. Where Ruppel argues that 'lesbian homoeroticism is almost unthinkable' in heteropatriarchal sexual economies, Sharon Marcus compellingly counters such reductive attitudes:

> Those seeking to restore lesbians to history portray their subjects as an outlawed minority defined by their exceptional sexual desire for women, their transgressive identification with masculinity, and their exclusion from institutions of marriage and family. Ironically, what all of these arguments share is an assumption that the opposition between men and women governs relationships between women, which take shape only as reactions against, retreats from, or appropriations of masculinity. (11)

Marcus's contentions here are a persuasive answer to Ruppel's insistence that lesbianism is inconceivable in patriarchal systems. She is clear, when we look for the lesbian subject only through the channels of those bodies that were exceptional, transgressive or excluded, we perpetuate heteropatriarchal paradigms that prioritise straight bodies as normative and male bonds as organisational. Relationships between women obviously existed alongside and within the heteropatriarchal systems that did not recognise or invest in those relationships.

When Marcus asks 'what becomes *thinkable* if we suspend the assumption that the heterosexual order opposed bonds between women' (emphasis added, 257), she urges us to privilege relationships between women, relationships that have been critically underserved by a narrow-minded approach that values the binary of the heterosexual matrix as the structure of any and all relationships. She writes of Woolf's phrase 'Chloe liked Olivia,' 'That the same sentence can refer to friendship as the antithesis of romance and to romance as the hidden truth of friendship suggests that whether they are lovers, friends, or coworkers, Chloe and

Olivia are overworked, and we need more than two proper names and a verb to do justice to the variety and complexity of women's social alliances' (258). Marcus proposes a nuanced lexicon to describe the meaningful spaces between women as desiring subjects which have traditionally only been articulable in relation to the needs of men. Fundamentally, Marcus' work supports my argument that the heteronormative romance plot of 'Freya of the Seven Isles' does not dissipate the intimacy between its female characters.

Because the elopement of Jaspar and Freya is ultimately thwarted by the vengeful Heemskirk, Antonia's role in their marriage plot – 'comedy camerista' 'in the secret' – invokes both the role of the female friend in what Marcus terms 'the plot of female amity' and of the queer romantic rival in the plot of 'female marriage'. Marcus finds these plots in Victorian novels, distinguishing them thus:

> The plot of female amity does not substitute for the conventional marriage plot, since the friend usually does not seek to replace a husband; when she does, the plot of female amity is displaced by the female marriage plot. In the plot of female amity, marriage and friendship are inseparable, and the woman who promotes a friend's marriage to a man is a forceful agent of the closure achieved once friendship and marriage have become parallel states and the future husband and wife have attained the harmony that already prevailed between female friends. (82)

Where female friendship is a steady, reliable, energizing spur for heteronormative marriage plots in Victorian literature, according to Marcus, in which the female friend encourages and helps the heroine to marry the male romantic lead, the female marriage plot is its antithesis. While Antonia's position 'in the secret' would suggest that she is the stable, supportive female friend who helps the heteronormative romance plot along, in the pattern of the plot of female amity, Jaspar and Freya's marriage is derailed by Heemskirk. Furthermore, when she pleads with Freya to run away with her, she is more in line with Marcus' definition of the female marriage plot from Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?*, 'courtship between a man and a woman' that is 'coterminous with one woman wooing another' (227), so perhaps we really can think of her as 'accompanying' Freya to 'irregular [. . .] matrimony'. Significantly, though Jaspar and his boat are part of the future for which Antonia urges, her language figures them as the means 'There's the brig. Captain Allen', necessary but distinct from the ends 'Let us run away at once.'

Freya's position becomes blurred in response to Antonia's plea as the heteronormative elopement becomes a future with Antonia that she must refuse. A prime example of Marcus' hypothesis that heterosexuality and erotically charged relationships between women were not historically mutually exclusive, in refusing Antonia, Freya is also rejecting Jasper, 'I! Run Away! [. . .] Never!'. Signifying both the heteronormative romantic match, but also the facilitation of running away with Antonia, Jasper, the brig and the elopement come to stand for both a normative and a queer narrative possibility, so that Freya's heterosexual desire for Jasper could equally be read in terms of her feelings on a future with Antonia. Her refusal could be read as a sign that she wants neither Antonia nor Jasper. Yet

while she is able to refuse Jasper at several points in the text, telling him notably '"I am not the sort of girl that gets carried off"' (FSI, 162), and while the reader must be left in no doubt that she would deny Antonia, her rebuffing is not spoken aloud and she is unable to look 'down at the scared girl' as she thinks it. Perhaps Freya doesn't want to reject Antonia; perhaps all the clues are here in these 'unsaid or half-said words'; perhaps 'Freya liked Antonia'.

Edith and Immada

The Rescue (1920) similarly contains a brief textual moment of intense sharing between women. It is the story of English Captain Tom Lingard, whose attempts to return his Malay friends Hassim, and his sister Immada, to power on their island (by hoarding illegal gun powder and weapons, and hiding Hassim and Immada on 'the Shore of Refuge' away from the Dutch colonial authorities) come unstuck when a yacht of British and European aristocrats, Mr. and Mrs. Travers, and Mr. d'Alcacer, become stranded in the shallows of the Shore, and expose the whole anti-colonial operation to Dutch attention. Lingard boards the yacht with Hassim and Immada to persuade the aristocrats to accompany him back to Europe. Due to Lingard's piratical status, the aristocrats refuse his help. Shortly afterwards, the Malay islanders who have harboured Hassim and Immada kidnap Mr. Travers and d'Alcacer; Lingard is then torn between his loyalty to Hassim and Immada, and his burgeoning desire for Edith Travers. Before the 'forbidden' colonial romance plays out between high society Mrs. Travers and the ruffianly Lingard, Edith and Immada, the two main female characters in the text, meet in a scene that rivals any of the heteronormative sexual tension that follows.

Through d'Alcacer's eyes, Edith is introduced to the reader as bored, disaffected and unhappy in her heterosexual marriage. D'Alcacer positions Edith as a fascinating muse figure, whose depression and disenchantment serve as a source of continual speculation for his idle curiosity; he ponders that he accepted Mr Travers' invitation to travel with them so that he could further observe and analyse Edith:

> She was even more interesting now, since a chance meeting and Mr. Travers' offer of a passage to Batavia had given him an opportunity of studying the various shades of scorn which he suspected to be the secret of her acquiescence in the shallowness of events and the monotony of a worldly existence. There were things that from the first he had not been able to understand; for instance, why she should have married Mr. Travers. It must have been from ambition. He could not help feeling that such a successful mistake would explain completely her scorn and also her acquiescence. (R, 108)

In d'Alcacer's assessment of her, Edith is an unhappy woman (because she married for social rather than romantic reasons) who moves through her privileged life with apathy and contempt: 'How far she was disenchanted he did not know, and did not attempt to find out. [. . .] He believed that even she herself would never know' (R, 109). Aside from the gendered narrative focalisation here, where brooding despondency still has to be expressed and defined by a white man, even when it is apparently being experienced by a woman, what interests me most

is d'Alcacer's absolute insistence that Edith is not attracted to her husband, and could not have been motivated to marry him by heterosexual desire.

This version of Edith, as disillusioned and cynical under a male gaze, is glaringly at odds with how she appears when she interacts with another woman, such as when she meets Immada for the first time: 'She walked impulsively toward the group on the quarter-deck, making straight for Immada [. . .] She said with animation: "Why, it's a girl!" Mrs. Travers extorted from d'Alcacer a fresh tribute of curiosity' (R, 120). In contrast to her putative detached air, here she is drawn towards Immada on an impulse that animates and excites her. That the effect of this exchange is measured not through Edith or Immada, but d'Alcacer, reflects the dominance of his focalisation on her initial presentation.

His ideological assumptions certainly inflect the account of Edith gazing at Immada for the first time:

> Mrs. Travers fixed her eyes on Immada. Fairhaired and white she asserted herself before the girl of olive face and raven locks with the maturity of perfection, with the superiority of the flower over the leaf, of the phrase that contains a thought over the cry that can only express an emotion. Immense spaces and countless centuries stretched between them: and she looked at her as when one looks into one's own heart with absorbed curiosity, with still wonder, with an immense compassion. (R, 121)

The glorification of Edith in this passage is commensurate with d'Alcacer's adoring focalisation, as her contact with Immada is framed through the colonial rhetoric of the meeting of 'the flower' and 'the leaf', 'the phrase' and 'the cry', the apparently superior 'fairhaired and white' woman versus the primitive 'girl of olive face and raven locks.' Both Edith and Immada are objectified and stratified on d'Alcacer's imagined spectrum of human civilisation and racial hierarchy.

When the reader is eventually presented with Edith's perspective on Immada, she appears infatuated:

> 'Almost a child! And so pretty! What a delicate face [. . .] I had no idea of anything so charmingly gentle,' she went on in a voice that without effort glowed, caressed, and had a magic power of delight to the soul. 'So young! And she lives here – does she? On the sea – or where? Lives–' Then faintly, as if she had been in the act of speaking, removed instantly to a great distance, she was heard again: 'How does she live?' (R, 122)

Speaking of Immada 'in a voice that without effort glowed, caressed' (further suggestive of the invigorating, arousing effect Immada's youth and beauty have on Edith, as well as the tenderness Edith already feels towards her), Edith is clearly enraptured by her. Her affection and adulation evoke what Terry Castle calls 'gynophilia: exaltation in the presence of the feminine [. . .] adoration: of female voices, bodies, and dreams' (230). Edith exalts in, and expresses her adoration for, Immada's body ('so pretty! What a delicate face'), but also for her voice and her dreams. Although she casts Immada as a 'charmingly gentle' child, implying a passivity that does not fit Immada (who calls for Lingard to let the aristocrats die on the following page (R, 124)), asking 'how does she live?' is more than a question of her difference,

it is a question that implies an understanding of her as an active subject, with an identity and personhood that exists away from European eyes.

Finally, we come to the moment in the text that changed everything for me when I first read it. When we are presented with Immada's response to Edith's attention, the world around them seems to stop in a charged, poignant breathing space: 'Immada turned upon Mrs. Travers her eyes black as coal, sparkling and soft like a tropical night; and the glances of the two women, their dissimilar and inquiring glances met, seemed to touch, clasp, hold each other with the grip of an intimate contact. They separated' (R, 122). While the sensational exoticism of Immada's eyes 'black as coal, sparkling and soft like a tropical night', that are 'turned upon Mrs Travers' suggesting ambush and surprise, evokes the imperial cultural codes that emphasize and sexualize Immada's alterity, the intensity of their connection here undermines the apparent cultural differences between them. They are locked together, gazing at one another, openly, ferociously in 'the grip of an intimate contact'. The tension between them climactically breaks and they are torn apart, 'they separated', the full stop further indicating the level of contact between them as broken eye-contact is equivalent to a broken touch.

Later, this intimacy translates into rivalry for Lingard's attention, in the only other meeting between the two of them. After the aristocrats are kidnapped, Lingard deliberates over whether to rescue them, risking the tentative trust he has built up with the islanders (their captors) and threatening the anti-colonial plot he has been devising with Hassim that relies on their co-operation. In the cabin of Lingard's ship, Edith and Immada compete for his loyalty, with Edith pleading for his help and Immada desperate for him to forget the Europeans and focus on their anti-colonial plan:

> Immada's dark and sorrowful eyes rested on the face of the white woman. Mrs. Travers felt as though she were engaged in a contest with them; in a struggle for the possession of that man's strength and of that man's devotion. [. . .]
>
> 'Do not! Do not look at that woman!' cried Immada. 'O! Master – look away . . .' Hassim threw one arm round the girl's neck. Her voice sank. 'O! Master – look at us.' Hassim, drawing her to himself, covered her lips with his hand. She struggled a little like a snared bird and submitted, hiding her face on his shoulder, very quiet, sobbing without noise.
>
> 'What do they say to you?' asked Mrs. Travers with a faint and pained smile. 'What can they say? It is intolerable to think that their words which have no meaning for me may go straight to your heart . . . .'
>
> 'Look away,' whispered Lingard without making the slightest movement. (R, 183-184)

The intensity with which Immada warns against Edith's gaze further evokes the 'grip of an intimate contact' they shared. In treating her as irresistibly attractive and eminently desirable, Immada recognises Edith's erotic potential here; interpreting her as an enticing temptation for Lingard, she positions Edith in this role, emphasising her appeal and imbuing their brief contact with even more of a sexual charge. Edith, on the other hand, is equally enthralled and discomposed by Immada's gaze, so that they are bound together once again, obsessing over

each other in a heightened exchange that supersedes the theatrics taking place around them. Being unable to speak to each other, the narrative of their suspicions plays out as they perform their heteronormative roles, deferring to Lingard as interlocutor. But the passionate frustration builds between them throughout this passage, as they become exasperated and animated by their desperation to communicate. In another example of the utility of Marcus' work, the heteropatriarchal narrative is thus parodied here by an underlying queer pressure that threatens to overwhelm it unless Hassim and Lingard step in to separate them. This is another breathing space in a sea of male posturing and colonial intrigue, in which two women connect in loaded ways within the protective parameters of their heteropatriarchal roles.

Though they are apart for the rest of the text, Edith is reminded of Immada's presence at least once more, as Lingard tells her to change into Immada's clothes when they go ashore:

> Mrs. Travers, in order to save her European boots for active service, had been persuaded to use a pair of leather sandals also extracted from that seaman's chest in the deckhouse. An additional fastening had been put on them but she could not avoid making a delicate clatter as she walked on the deck. No part of her costume made her feel so exotic. It also forced her to alter her usual gait and move with quick, short steps very much like Immada. 'I am robbing the girl of her clothes,' she had thought to herself, 'besides other things.' She knew by this time that a girl of such high rank would never dream of wearing anything that had been worn by somebody else. (R, 235-236)

Edith must sacrifice the Western cultural codes that clothe her in order to assimilate to the new challenges of the unknown landscape and culture. That this attempt to 'blend in' should suggest a 'blending in' to Immada, treading in her footsteps and imitating her gait, belies a projected bodily contact between them. Edith suggestively frames wearing Immada's clothes as stripping Immada naked ('"robbing the girl of her clothes"'), while at the same time imagining it in terms of transgressive proximity that she alone forces (rather than the demands of the plot). Edith's fascination with Immada's body here, and the closeness she evokes in her thoughts on wearing these clothes, denote an element of female homoeroticism that has been ignored in scholarship of the novel. Meanwhile, the cultural dimensions of this moment, the 'theft' of Immada's clothing, and walk, and relevance to Lingard (as suggested by the 'other things' Edith references), denote this dressing up as an act of colonial appropriation that has been the focus of much critical attention.

Christopher GoGwilt argues that Edith is emblematic of European readers who are ignorant of the significance of the Malay politics that surround her. For GoGwilt, this is 'an important example of misogynistic gestures throughout Conrad's works' (80). He contends that 'a stereotyped doubling of Edith Travers and Immada' produces 'a contrast that seems designed to authenticate an imaginary native Malay identity by displaying an ignorant European reading' (81). According to GoGwilt, the contact between Edith and Immada is a 'doubling' which works to contrast Immada's authentic Malay identity against the caricature he believes Edith projects onto her. Moreover, this caricature, which GoGwilt reads as manifesting out of the 'doubling' (the moments when they are contrasted in the text, side-by-

side figuratively or literally), symbolises Edith's European ignorance, which in turn exemplifies Conradian 'misogynistic gestures.' In other words, because the moments between Edith and Immada reflect the way Edith sees Immada (and this is different to the way she is seen elsewhere in the text, according to GoGwilt), GoGwilt reads the moments between Edith and Immada as examples of Conrad's misogyny. However, I would argue GoGwilt's reading is itself an example of the way misogynistic choices organise Conrad scholarship.

The character collapse that takes place when GoGwilt describes the women as doubles is reminiscent of the violence Phyllis A. Roth does to any reading of the relationship *between* Mina and Lucy in *Dracula*, when she describes them as 'essentially the same figure' (417). If we read like GoGwilt, 'the grip of an intimate contact' is no longer a moment *between* Edith and Immada – of curiosity, connection and passion – but a moment around them; we don't look through their eyes, to ask what they think or feel, because we apparently know all there is to know about these women by looking *at* them. Like Hodges and Ruppel, GoGwilt nominates female characters as stereotypes, and in so doing reduces them to those stereotypes by refusing to treat them as characters. There is an electric space between Edith and Immada that is charged with subversive narrative possibilities. This is shut down in the text by the manoeuvrings and designs of men, as the heteronormative colonial intrigue that predominates the novel overrides these lesbian breathing spaces, but it is shut down outside of the text by critics like GoGwilt who decide to deal with the presence of women in Conrad's work by reducing them to 'doubles'. To delineate the space between Edith and Immada, the space that contracts when they are close and expands when they are apart, is also to interrogate the scholarship that continually denies that this space exists.

Yannick Le Boulicaut's sexually loaded descriptions of the dynamic between Edith and Immada best demonstrates the paradoxical way that scholarship which stages these two women fails to explore the consequences of the contact between them. At the beginning of his essay he posits that Edith is attracted to Immada: 'How does this bored Western lady, who is but a flat character at the beginning of the narrative, become a subversive woman attracted to a British trader and a native princess?' (161). Yet he dwells almost exclusively on the romance with the 'British trader' rather than the 'native princess,' despite his repeated use of sexualized language to describe Edith's contact with Immada: 'Above all, Mrs Travers is particularly *seduced* by the fact that this *gorgeous* Oriental princess – Immada, is, unlike herself, actually allowed to be sincere' (emphases added, 163). He postulates a seduction before transmuting it into cultural stereotypes of repressed Western femininity and emotional Eastern primitivism.

The most startling example of this sexualizing language is his description of Edith wearing Immada's clothes:

> By using Immada's clothes without the latter's permission, Mrs Travers acts like a thief stealing Immada's garments and taking up her place. She overtakes Immada both as a princess and Lingard's sweetheart. By doing so Mrs Travers crosses a cultural line: the clothes which had been kept in Lingard's chest are probably wedding

> or ceremony dress. They may have a considerable value for Immada and Hassim. To use these outfits outside their social or religious context, as does Edith, is a form of sacrilege. Mrs Travers *unwillingly rapes* Immada's intimacy. In this specific case, she acts as a typical Western colonist who does not make the slightest effort to understand or show respect for Immada's otherness. (emphasis added, 166)

For Le Boulicaut, Edith's dress casts her as a thief, rival, and (rather oxymoronically) an 'unwilling rapist', constituting her identity as a Western colonist. While rape is about power rather than sex, Le Boulicaut's invocation of it here figures their contact in provocative, titillating and abhorrent terms. More significantly, by describing it as 'unwilling rape,' Le Boulicaut suggests that sex between women can only become thinkable, even metaphorically, when it is imagined as something that neither woman wants to happen.

Le Boulicaut is not alone in reading Edith's dressing as Immada as cultural appropriation. Robert Hampson also reads Edith's dress as a colonial power play: 'Mrs Travers's dress is not an acceptance of Otherness, but rather deprives Otherness of its subjectivity and substantiality [. . .] Mrs Travers sails through these experiences supported by an unspoken conviction of cultural superiority' (2000, 180). Note the recurring critical invocation of Edith's heteropatriarchal value, with neither Le Boulicaut nor Hampson letting go of the 'Mrs'. While it is clear here that Hampson, like Le Boulicaut, takes issue with Edith's putative colonial supremacy over Immada, I would ask where Immada takes up space in either of their readings? For Le Boulicaut, she is a silent victim, in love with Lingard (because, like Kurtz, he must just be *that* irresistible), who has her wedding dress stolen by a white woman, and for Hampson she is present only under the sign of 'Otherness.' Both critics write about her clothes as a symbol of culture and of Edith's cultural identity, but not as a symbol of her, not as a haunting reminder of her absence in the text; and so, their writing becomes a symbol of her absence in the scholarship.

Indeed, after being evoked as the victim of an 'unwilling rape,' she all but disappears from Le Boulicaut's essay. On the following page, the figuration of Edith's dress as violent sexual contact is diluted, and the attention is drawn back to Edith and Lingard: 'By turning into a subversive woman, Mrs Travers has paved the way for moral dissolution and chaos. She has stepped into the shoes of a princess, and Princess Edith is now helping King Tom and both are physically and emotionally enmeshed in an intricate relationship' (167). Where Immada becomes 'a princess', her 'rape' becomes Edith 'stepp[ing] into [her] shoes,' and Edith's position as a Western colonist is transmuted into that of 'subversive woman' in a heteronormative relationship. Exploring neither the racial nor gendered implications of an 'unwilling rape' between a Malay woman and an English woman, Le Boulicaut instead fashions the contact between them into a facilitation of heterosexuality, the 'intricate relationship' between the two white lead protagonists.

The cultural difference represented by Immada's clothing is reduced to a conduit for Edith's apparent (hetero)sexual liberation: 'Having deliberately crossed over to the other side

of the cultural divide, Mrs Travers has in some superficial sense become an Oriental. She gradually unveils her repressed femininity and her sexuality' (Le Boulicaut, 168-169). Surely if Edith is sexually liberated by wearing Immada's clothes, this speaks to an erotic exchange between these women. Yet the repeated critical denial here, the refusal to analyse the space *between* Edith and Immada, to read *for* them and their relationship, works to exclude female desire, relationships between women, and lesbian identity from the scope of Conrad scholarship. Though Le Boulicaut is making this point to argue Edith's dress is merely 'an operatic performance,' the implication that Malaysian culture produces relaxed sexual practices, that 'the East' acts as the backdrop to sexual fantasies 'the West' represses, is itself a familiar trope of colonial discourse. Just as Hodges perpetuates a homophobic stereotype when he argues Conrad is being homophobic, GoGwilt curtails feminist readings of Conrad when he describes him as misogynist, and Hampson absents Immada from her clothes when he argues that Edith's dress 'deprives Otherness of its subjectivity and substantiality', Le Boulicaut's contentions about cultural appropriation rely on colonial stereotypes. The problem is not with the dead white man, then, but with the scholarship that followed him.

The voice that coalesces from the fragments of the Conrad criticism I have quoted reiterates a heteropatriarchal 'we', but I choose to be 'in the secret' of the breathing spaces within Conrad's texts in which women desire women. The moments between Freya and Antonia, and Edith and Immada may be small and fleeting, but they are charged with sexual promise and queer narrative possibilities. It is a choice to prioritise these women and re-contextualise their contact in this way, just as it has been a choice for the critics before me to marginalise lesbianism in the Conrad canon, reducing it to a starched blouse and a footnote. In proposing that there is female homoeroticism in Conrad's work, I *am* seeing homosexuality where there isn't any, where I was told there wasn't any, because it's about time somebody did. In the following chapter, I continue to 'look for trouble' in this way by tracing the digital afterlives of these breathing spaces, as I explore the illustrations that accompanied 'Freya of the Seven Isles' and *The Rescue* on their initial periodical publications.

Chapter 2: Looking for Trouble: Seeing the Invisible Lesbian in the Digital Periodical Archive

In Chapter 1, I argued that there was a way of reading Conrad's work that illuminated queer narratives. I proposed that by focusing on the small, intimate moments of female homoerotic pleasure, contact and tension between Freya and Antonia in 'Freya of the Seven Isles,' and Edith and Immada in *The Rescue*, a feminist undercurrent of cross-cultural lesbian desire may be found in the writing of a dead white man.

In this, the second chapter of Part 1, I examine the same texts in the contemporary periodical contexts in which they were first published, which have been digitised and made available through the open access archive Conrad First. Analysing the images that accompanied the serialized texts, I argue that the computer screen through which I view them becomes a site of queer pleasure, putting 'bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality' (Ahmed, 2014a, 165). The 'invisible lesbians' of Conrad's texts are made visible in the illustrations of early twentieth century magazines, as the process by which certain female desires are obscured is staged in the pages of these serials.

In order to fully serve these contexts, I will first explore the way Conrad criticism has used periodical research, and how this fits in to the relatively emergent field of modern periodical studies. I will then detail my own interpretation of the field, its relevance to my search for the 'invisible lesbian', and how the particularities of a digital archive can bring her into focus. Having established the various scholarly discourses shaping this work, I will then present close analyses of the publication contexts that inflected 'Freya of the Seven Isles' and *The Rescue*.

Periodical Contexts

The dominant framework within which Conrad's work has been assessed in relation to periodical contexts, has been in terms of how Conrad felt about them. When Roger Osborne rationalises his interest in the original serializations of *Victory,* he laments that they 'have been granted limited authority as an ***expression of Conrad's intentions***' (emphasis added, 270), suggesting their worth lies in what they can tell us about Conrad and his hopes for his text. Ironically however, the implications of Osborne's research trouble the paradigm of authorial intent. Osborne argues that in being serialized in popular magazines and newspapers, *Victory* became the cultural property of a different kind of readership:

> Like *Munsey's Magazine*, the *Star* pushed *Victory* toward an expected response in the space of its women's pages. With this, the evening newspaper and the monthly magazine took possession of the novel for their own purposes, and, in setting it in their own context, encouraged a reading of the novel that was removed from the aesthetic concerns of Conrad's more 'bookish' readers. (285)

Pitched towards a working class, mainstream, female audience in *Munsey's Magazine* and the London *Star*, certain elements of *Victory* were emphasised; under the gaze of these readers, the novel might be remembered as a 'bodice ripper' about a feisty heroine, rather than a philosophising angst-ridden white male exile. Though Osborne frames his work in relation to Conrad's vision of the text, he shows that periodical contexts have the power to unpick the sticky literary reputation and legacy of 'Conrad', as his texts are transformed by the different spaces in which they are disseminated and consumed.

David M. Earle articulates why we find it so hard to decentre 'Conrad', the author-God, from his popular publication contexts: 'Conrad's pulp publications have been largely neglected exactly because they are popular and unavoidably economic, but also because they demand a distinct methodology of reading that differs from how we read hard-covers, story collections, and little magazines' (2013, 48). Contending that a 'distinct methodology' is required to enable a reading of Conrad that separates his work from its canonical associations, Earle consistently places ideas of form and print culture at the centre of his research, rather than Conrad's authorial intentions. Earle's work suggests that analysis of the popular contexts in which Conrad's writing has materialised can decentre the sticky canonical 'Conrad' and engender a way of reading his texts that challenges what (and who) they have always represented.

The particular properties of the periodical, as a space in which Conrad's texts were published, significantly undermine his authority and centrality in the production of their meaning. In being published in periodical form, Conrad's serialized novels and short stories were subsumed as contributing parts to unstable, malleable, ephemeral texts, that, as Margaret Beetham argues, are 'marked by a radical heterogeneity' as they refuse 'a single authorial voice' (11). This heterogeneity is also found in the 'multiple internal forms – letterpress, advertising, text, image, paper, page design' of the periodical space, that Patrick Collier argues 'interact in a historical moment to give order and meaning to a multiplex reality' (108). Engaging with the 'multiplex reality' and 'radical heterogeneity' of the periodical form can reshape our understanding of the author-Gods of the literary canon.

In her work on Henry James' periodical publications, and how the illustrations that accompanied his texts shaped their meaning, Amy Tucker highlights the way this heterogeneity unsettles the codes by which James has been canonized: 'the magazine oeuvre of a canonical figure like James troubles an established, monolithic concept of authorship by presenting written work in the context of a variety of decisions made not only by the writer but by editors, publishers, compositors, printers, [and] illustrators' (12). When James is positioned as a contributor to the periodical text, his authority as the creator of meaning in his texts unravels, as his words are mediated through a series of conflicting voices.

As Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey argue, it is the periodical context specifically that challenges the authority of the canon: 'print culture scholarship has made more visible the way in which canons and reputations were created in the first half of the twentieth century,

dislodging the exemplary status of writers such as Joyce for the sake of a more dynamic and complex description of the way in which works came into print' (27). Acknowledging the plurality of the periodical form, the multiple ephemeral voices, images, and narratives that accompanied the works of art that have since been marked as culturally indispensable, exposes the processes by which those works (and their creators) have been privileged in literary history.

For Collier, the 'multiplex reality' the periodical represents occupies a particular 'historical moment', but integral to the texture of periodical texts is a much more complicated relationship to time. Beetham argues that in order to fulfil the conditions of 'maintain[ing] a readership' an issue of a periodical does not stand alone as a discontinuous, cogent product in its own right, without also representing a longer chain of cultural memory and association: 'The key element in reading the periodical is its double relationship to time. Each number of a periodical is both of its moment and of a series, different from and yet the same as those which have gone before' (11). James Mussell similarly thinks of 'periodical time' in terms of an

> interplay of sameness and difference, where changing content is presented through a set of features that recur, issue after issue. No article is encountered in isolation, but sits alongside others on the page, in the issue, and in the issues that have appeared previously; equally, each issue reminds readers of those that have come before and promises more to follow. (2013, qtd. in Hammill and Hussey, 11-12)

Beetham and Mussell both emphasise the paradoxes of 'periodical time', whereby a singular article or feature, in a singular periodical issue, is tied to (and in existence because of) all those articles, features and issues that have gone before, as well as all those that are yet to come. Meanwhile, each singular article, feature or issue is simultaneously defined by the fact that it is different from all the other articles, features and issues with which it is associated.

The construction of 'periodical time' is particularly shaped by the destabilising potential with which periodicals might be consumed, as Beetham explains, when she argues that regular buyers and readers of periodicals 'have power as readers because they can to a unique degree construct their own text from the printed version. We do not read a magazine straight through from front to back as we do a novel. The form invites us to flip through, read in any order, omit some sections altogether and read others carefully' (12). The serialized text printed in the periodical form might be rewritten, reordered and restructured by any reader who misses an instalment, forgets what has happened in the last one or imagines their own ending to the next one. The nature of the periodical's consumption means that its content is never stable or fixed, as texts within it may be shaped and reformed depending how and when they are read.

Because of the importance of their consumability, because they are shaped by how they are consumed, Beetham argues it is helpful to think of periodicals as part of consumer society, not just as commodities in themselves, but as products that 'helped to create a commodity culture' (9). Similarly, in her paper 'Feminist Things' on suffragette publications,

Barbara Green argues, 'It is first, perhaps, in their role as tour guides to a world of things, mediators that describe, promote and sell, that early twentieth century periodicals open a window onto the theories of objects that organized relationships between their readers and the things surrounding them' (66). Green suggests that reading periodicals as 'things,' engaging with their 'thingness,' is paramount to understanding the value of the periodical text. For her, periodical scholarship means recognising the place of the periodical in a circuit of exchange, in which ideas, products and spaces are bought, sold and designed to reach out and touch the reader, materially as well as ideologically. Hammill and Hussey likewise emphasise the 'thingness' of periodical studies when they argue 'Print culture scholarship might, perhaps, be seen as a kind of thing theory' (39).

In his call to decentre modernism from periodical studies, the 'thingness' of the periodical is what Collier wants scholars to embrace most urgently and in its purest form. He writes, 'We might start with only one assumption: that the periodical is valuable simply because it exists – because it once performed some desirable functions for some number of people – and set as our first conceptual task reaching some hypotheses on what those functions were' (109). Collier argues that the point of periodical studies should be to study the periodical as a distinct and discursive object in its own right, rather than as an emblem of literary modernism. He proposes that the periodical's value to the people who once read it should be the real organizing principle of research in this field.

He goes on to argue that only once we have approached the periodical object in this way 'can we make determinations about why the periodical should gain a new existence (be "recovered") through our work, which broader critical or theoretical conversations it illuminates, what desirable functions it might perform for us' (109). Before we can project our own academic evaluations, literary assumptions, and theoretical discourses onto the periodical object, Collier insists, we must first consider it in terms of its value for its original readers. If we fail to consider the ways it affected original readers, Collier contends, our own interpretations will always be attenuated.

However, Ahmed's work in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* suggests that the responses of readers 'then and now' cannot be so easily separated. Her argument that 'objects which circulate *accumulate* affective value' (emphasis added, 2014a, 218) suggests that the associations that become attached to periodical-objects are cumulative, implying a continuum of responses that are not distinct from one another. The different ways a periodical-text may have touched and been touched by its audience cannot be so easily measured that it becomes something we can pin down and categorically ascertain before we allow *ourselves* to touch or be touched by it.

When Mussell describes finding 'the words "to be retained" [. . .] scribbled in pencil in a nineteenth-century hand' (2012, 77) on some supplements of the periodical *Monthly Repository*, in the Bodleian Library, he aptly demonstrates the way we might sometimes have

already-attached feelings for an object, before we have a chance to objectively review the way its original audience may have felt about it. He writes, 'I vividly recall the feeling, probably familiar to most researchers who have spent time in the archives, of connection with a moment that had passed. For a second, stood in a lit corridor in the otherwise deserted, dark stacks, I was linked to that decision, long ago, to mark in pencil the printed object in my hands' (2012, 77-78). In the archival context, that anonymous 'nineteenth-century hand' reaches out and takes hold of Mussell's own hand. Here he is already experiencing at least some of the 'desirable functions' this periodical 'might perform for us,' before he can think about the desirable functions 'it once performed [. . .] for some number of people' (Collier, 109). What Mussell captures in this eloquent and moving account, is the symbiotic relationship that underpins periodical research, a field that brings together the readers of 'now and then,' rather than separating them into distinct audiences.

This is not to say that I disagree with Collier's broader call to re-evaluate periodical studies of the early twentieth century, so that they may be read on their own terms, rather than as supposed symbols of modernism's cultural reach. But the periodicals I look at in this chapter meant something to me before I saw them. They were always already recoded from their original context, because they were always already part of the narrative I constructed about my research. It was this narrative that impelled me to look at them in the first place. I wanted to find something to authenticate my engagement with Conrad, a way to read his texts that did not rely on the canon and criticism with which I could not engage, and to which I could not relate. I turned to the periodicals because I believed them to reflect something 'true', and I hoped that they might make my work more 'original.' Because I came to these periodicals to authenticate my own reading, to find something like myself within them, something I have not found elsewhere (perhaps because I am not meant to find it), I arrived at the periodical text already 'affectively "out of tune"' (Ahmed 2014a, 223), with the type of periodical scholarship Collier wants to engender. Yet I maintain it is still important for me to search for this authentication, even if I am doomed to fail both the requirements of Conrad scholarship (which I apparently failed the moment I became 'a practising homosexual' according to Richard J. Ruppel (2)), and periodical studies.

As Beetham says, 'In the complicated negotiations over meaning which characterise popular print, some groups have more power than others to make their meanings "stick"' (3). Trying to take on as much of Collier's valuable advice as possible, while still acknowledging the biases that make this difficult, I insist on seeing what I am not meant to. I want my meaning to 'stick' to these print objects, if only in this thesis. As Ahmed argues, the narratives I hope to authenticate within these periodicals were always going to affect the way I experienced them: 'How the object impresses (upon) us may depend on histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions' (2014a, 8). I trace a history in these periodical-objects that

has always been marked upon me, and that I cannot help marking upon them; I felt something for these objects before I began, something I could not unfeel.

The 'Invisible Lesbian'

In *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism*, Jodie Medd looks at the figure of lesbianism in legal and literary discourses of the early twentieth century. She examines the way the allegation of lesbianism was figured in obscenity trials surrounding modernist literature, proposing that lesbianism has long occupied a cultural void. She writes, '"Lesbian" historians, philosophers, and literary critics tend to agree: Lesbianism in the modern West has been largely invisible, cognitively unthinkable, and culturally and epistemologically "non existent"' (2012, 2). In the hegemonic culture of the early twentieth century (and arguably of today too), lesbianism is unthinkable because it cannot be allowed into thought; it does not exist in this space, because it is not allowed to exist here. In these spaces, I think of it as strategically unseen.

As Terry Castle famously puts it in *The Apparitional Lesbian* when she writes of the way lesbianism has been written out of Greta Garbo's biography,

> The lesbian is never with us, it seems but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night. She is far away and she is dire. (She has seldom seemed as accessible, for instance, as her ingratiating twin brother, the male homosexual.) What we never expect is precisely this: to find her in the midst of things, as familiar and crucial as an old friend, as solid and sexy as the proverbial right-hand man, as intelligent and human and funny and real as Garbo. (2-3)

The 'apparitional lesbian' ghosts the margins, materialising in the shadows; she is never expected to appear in the middle of the screen, as the centre of attention. But, as Castle goes on to argue, this marginalisation is telling in itself: 'the very frequency with which the lesbian has been "apparitionalized" in the Western imagination also testifies to her peculiar cultural power. Only something very palpable – at a deeper level – has the capacity to "haunt" us so thoroughly' (7). Indeed, Medd argues that it is invisibility that makes the lesbian such an important and revealing figure, functioning as 'both the very condition of lesbianism's representation, and its means of exposing the lack in systems of representation' (2012, 4). Lesbianism, as a concept, lies beyond the bounds of what can be spoken or prohibited in dominant discourse, and thus exposes the limits of the patriarchal, heteronormative lexicon. In being unspeakable, lesbianism marks that lexicon, which might pose as neutral, authoritative or objective, as innately gendered, political and paranoid. I argue that because of the ephemeral characteristics of the periodical, it is a form directly placed to make visible the invisible lesbian.

Mussell argues that ephemera 'plays a double role: while representing what has been remembered, it belongs among the many other objects that have necessarily been forgotten'

(2012, 81). The ephemeral object, such as the periodical, represents a dualistic tension between its function as a disposable thing, designed to be enjoyed in the moment, and its existence as an artefact that memorialises the quotidian. Mussell explains: 'The objects that survive from the past into the present, whether kept by individuals or institutions, are preserved for reasons other than their function in enabling everyday life. Both private and public relics serve as the material basis for the production of narratives about the past' (2012, 81). The paradoxical objects of material culture, that were forgettable in the past but are now sanctified in the present, embody the processes by which we establish what matters culturally, the narratives of the past we choose to preserve, and therefore how narratives of the past are constructed. As Mussell writes, 'their persistence belies the selective acts of memory through which we narrate our relation to the past' (2012, 80). As monuments to that which was meant to be forgotten (but continues to exist despite itself), ephemeral periodicals are distinctly suited to memorialising the lesbian figure who we are not meant to see in our historical archives. If looking at ephemera represents the project of deliberately remembering that which we are meant to forget, the space of the periodical may be the one in which the invisible lesbian emerges most clearly.

As Mussell goes on to argue, digitised ephemera, such as the periodicals made available by Conrad First, are even more well placed to transport the forgotten (repressed) narratives of the past and bring them into focus today: 'Digitisation allows us to remember print ephemera by resituating it alongside other privileged objects in the digital archive. As long as it is well-encoded, ephemera can become much more accessible, returning the everyday to its place amongst the memorialised' (2012, 87). In becoming part of our everyday digital environment, ephemeral content memorialised in online archives more closely approximates its original quotidian, populist role, while also being repositioned as unforgettable.

Digitisation

The open-access digital archive Conrad First curates many of the periodicals and magazines in which Conrad's writing first appeared, to allow us to 'read Conrad the way his first audiences did' (Donovan, 2013, par. 3). I do not find value in this resource for its ability to conjure a pure, original audience of Conrad's texts however, as I subscribe to Derek Attridge's belief that 'first readers' can never be discernible as a 'homogenous and clearly defined group' (2012, 236). Instead, I recognise the fact that it has allowed me to look for that which I cannot find in the tightly controlled 'Conradian' canon. Conrad First offers visual contexts in which Conrad was first published that transcend the sticky associations that have constructed the author as high-brow, respectable and literary because of his writings about white men. As a mediating filter through which I have experienced these periodicals, however, the digital aspect of these objects is important to acknowledge here.

In 2005, Patrick Leary wrote of his anxiety that the time 'when whatever is not online will simply cease to exist as far as anyone but specialists is concerned' was fast approaching (82). He worried about what he called 'the offline penumbra,' 'that increasingly remote and unvisited shadowland into which even quite important texts fall if they cannot yet be explored, or perhaps even identified, by any electronic means' (82). Collier's reference to 'the offline penumbra' ten years later, as something that 'remains a concern' for the future of periodical studies, suggests Leary's fears were not unfounded. As all of the periodicals I explore are those which have been made available through Conrad First, this chapter evidences the extent to which academic attention is dictated by the scale of the digital archive. Mussell warns of trusting the digital archive so completely, when he reminds us that 'archives, as intentional collections of objects, with their own policies of inclusion and exclusion, have never been neutral. [. . .] The archive is a product of culture, whether digital or not' (2014, 383-4). Similarly, Adeline Koh argues that digitisation efforts have invariably privileged European authors, and preserved narratives of benevolent and benign European imperialism: 'Many open-access, publicly funded projects on the literature of the nineteenth century concentrate primarily on people of European descent, and obscure the impact of imperial endeavours in the nineteenth century' (385). Conrad's canonical status, as a dead white man, writing about other white men, surely informs the existence of such an extensive, detailed and accessible archive as Conrad First. And as Earle suggests, when he points out that canonization is 'reliant on reprints,' (2013, 48), the existence of this new Conrad canon depends on, recirculates and perpetuates the canonical status of the old one.

As well as limiting the scope of scholarly enquiry, there is also a concern in periodical studies that digitisation limits the type of contact we have with these objects, as Hammill and Hussey explain: 'Digital texts are [. . .] remediated for our own era, and deprived of some of the material dimensions of their paper-based precursors' (23). Seeing these periodicals through the screen rather than holding them in our hands is a form of 'deprivation' for Hammill and Hussey. Undeniably, part of what makes Mussell's anecdote about reading the nineteenth-century pencil mark so evocative, is the physicality of 'the printed object in [his] hands' (2012, 78). There is a consensus building here that digitisation means a loss of this type of material contact with archival content.

According to Matthew Kirschenbaum, it is an apparent lack of materiality that so defines our experience of 'the digital' as users: 'a digital environment is an abstract projection supported and sustained by its capacity to propagate the illusion (or call it a working model) of *immaterial* behaviour: identification without ambiguity, transmission without loss, repetition without originality' (emphasis original, 11). Digital spaces, Kirschenbaum argues, are those that we experience as being distinctly immaterial, despite the many technological processes taking place beneath the surface that condition this response. This suggests that in viewing the periodical digitally, I can never read it as an artefact in its own right, as Collier has urged,

because it is always mediated through the orchestrated glare of my computer screen, which is itself overwritten with codes of power. Yet what Kirschenbaum's argument really gestures towards, when he insists on highlighting 'the illusion' of immateriality, is the disguised, but nevertheless perceptible, materiality of 'the digital'. I propose that far from being an experience characterised by the loss, lack and deprivation of a material component, contact with periodicals through the digital archive offers us an alternative, but still resolutely visceral, channel through which to engage with periodical content.

For me, the computer screen functions as a decisive site (and sight) of the 'queer pleasures' Ahmed describes, 'queer pleasures [that] put bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality' (2014a, 165). The computer screen facilitates my queer gaze, enabling me to find in at least some part of the 'Conradian' archive the narratives of lesbian desire that have been made invisible in Conrad scholarship and the mainstream literary canon more broadly.

Ahmed explains the subversive power of putting together bodies that have been kept apart: 'When bodies touch and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped' (2014a, 165). The surface of our bodies is worked and reworked based on what and who comes into contact with us, who we are allowed to touch and be touched by. Ahmed goes onto argue that spaces of queer pleasure, that allow and even encourage the coming together of kept-apart bodies, also affect the way other spaces may be organized: 'The hope of queer is that the reshaping of bodies through the enjoyment of what or who has been barred can "impress" differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple' (2014a, 165). Once bodies that have been kept apart are able to come together *somewhere*, they are no longer defined as apart *everywhere*; the visibility of queer pleasures, the act of seeing queer bodies together in public, produces a new social pattern in which bodies do not have to adhere to the strictures of the heteronormative paradigm. Indeed, Ahmed suggests that the experience and power of 'queer pleasures,' of which she writes, is not limited to sexual contact: 'Queer pleasures are not just about the coming together of bodies in sexual intimacy. Queer bodies "gather" in spaces, through the pleasure of opening up to other bodies' (2014a, 165). The act of seeing, and the decision to see, queer bodies together might be thought of as a decision to open ourselves, and our eyes, to a version (vision) of that which is not structured by heteronormativity.

Reina Lewis' words on gazing queerly at fashion magazines resonate with Ahmed's contentions here, emphasising the way 'opening up' can be a decidedly visual practice, when she writes 'as consumers of each other's appearance, there is a pleasure to be had in recognizing and being recognized' (465). Seeing the lesbian body, or recoding bodies as lesbian under a lesbian gaze, in spaces like mainstream fashion magazines in which they have previously been invisible, constitutes a pleasurable recognition that is revolutionary simply by

existing. Lewis writes of this pleasure of finding lesbian bodies resting 'on recognizable lesbian visual codes and on the activity of a transgressive, and often narrativized, reading' (466). Identifying the lesbian body in contexts in which it is not normally found, Lewis suggests, means reading these spaces and the bodies organized within them in consciously political, subjective ways. Lewis suggests that looking for the invisible lesbian, choosing to see her where she is not meant to be seen, means a deliberate choice to look for what is always supposed to be unseeable. I like to think of this practice as a kind of knowingly disobedient way of looking, or as if I am looking for trouble.

If I think of my computer screen as a site (and sight) of Ahmedian 'queer pleasures,' the digital periodical object under my gaze becomes another site (and sight) of something that I want to see. The fact that I want to see this, whether others see it or not, is enough of a reason to look for it. That being said, queering the digital periodical object is not simply an act of building spaces of recognition, in which I personally am able to see that which has been strategically unseen. It also keeps these periodicals alive. Mussell writes of his concern that now that ephemeral objects are only a click away from us at any given time, 'there is a danger that in digitising this material we forget it once more' (2012, 88). Now that such an extensive, available and detailed collection like Conrad First exists, it is important that we do more with it than 'read Conrad the way his first audiences did' (Donovan, 2013, par. 3); rather, to really recover these contexts, we need to look at them afresh, finding new subjectivities within them that represent the world that they are part of today. As Mussell writes, 'Knowledge is produced through what users are permitted to do within digital resources: if we want to produce new knowledges, new ways of understanding the period and its people, then we have to allow digitized objects to behave in new ways' (2014, 383). If we want to produce a new, inclusive narrative of the past we need to look at these digital objects in new, inclusive ways. In my analysis of the periodical contexts in which 'Freya of the Seven of the Isles' and *The Rescue* were first published, I examine the images that accompanied the texts, as well as the way in which these female characters materialised, and how their stories were told and sold. I ask how the bodies of Freya, Antonia, Edith and Immada are drawn and redrawn in these spaces, how they are 'kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality,' and how my queer screen can put them back together.

Freya and Antonia

Conrad First lists six entries for the serialization of 'Freya of the Seven Isles', but I am looking at the three English language periodicals that published the text: *The Metropolitan Magazine* of New York, in which the story first appeared in the April 1912 issue; *The London Magazine*, which published it in July 1912; and *The Golden Book*, also of New York, which serialized the story much later, over three issues from August to October 1930.

The Metropolitan Magazine, described by Rachel Schreiber as 'mainstream' (159), was a popular, affordable American monthly magazine with 1 million readers and a Progressive political agenda, that Laura Davis argues 'signified its commitment to fiction by trading on Conrad's name' (246). Davis writes that the editors of *Metropolitan* 'deleted a full third of "Freya" to both shorten the story and simplify its narrative structure' (254), making space for Clifford W. Ashley's large illustrations. With fellow editors J. A. Berthoud and S. W. Reid, Davis argues, in the Cambridge edition of '*Twixt Land and Sea*, that the illustrations and 'the editors' alterations of the text, moved "Freya of the Seven Isles" closer to the genre of popular romance that, at face value, its setting and subject matter suggested' (269). Because of these cuts, most of the moments between Antonia and Freya, about which I wrote in detail in the previous chapter, do not feature in the *Metropolitan*'s text.

The text that appeared in *The London Magazine* was marketed in similar ways, with excisions made, Berthoud, Davis and Reid argue, to keep 'the locus of tension in the central triangle, while dissipating the story's sexuality' (272). They argue these edits were made 'specifically for [*The London Magazine*'s] readers, and especially, it seems, to avoid improprieties and coarseness' (272). Stephen Donovan argues that 'readers of *London Magazine* who were accustomed to love stories that ended happily in marriage' would have been frustrated by 'the tragic and downbeat' ending of 'Freya of the Seven Isles' (2009, 164). Donovan contends that, nevertheless, being published in *The London Magazine* 'brought Conrad's work to the attention of a mass audience in Britain' (2009, 153-154), emphasising the popular context, similar to that of *The Metropolitan Magazine*, of this periodical space in which the story was consumed.

This popular context, in which Conrad would have been read not as a sanctified, untouchable pillar of the literary canon, but 'as a writer of the newsstand' (Earle, 2013, 49), also characterised the American reprint magazine *The Golden Book*. The purpose of *The Golden Book*, according to Earle, 'was to bring quality literature to the newsstand,' by featuring 'respected authors mixed in with genre authors' (2013, 45). Earle argues that being published in *The Golden Book* 'put Conrad into the hands of hundreds of thousands of readers in a form that was neither antagonistic nor condescending to the masses. In these magazines Conrad became a gateway figure for class mobility and literacy' (2013, 45). Just as in *The Metropolitan Magazine*, Conrad's name elevated the popular periodical space of *The Golden Book*; this context in turn presented a disposable version of his work designed to be devoured speedily and for pleasure, rather than pored over or studied.

The other component that links these periodical contexts, is the way in which Conrad's 'Freya of the Seven Isles' is sold within their pages visually. Each serialization is illustrated, with these illustrations constructing a particular version of the narrative, in which some bodies are allowed to be together and others are not. Antonia does not materialize clearly in these illustrations, nor is Freya ever illustrated on her own; these versions of the

story are apparently only populated by white male bodies, with the exception of one dependent, passive, desirable white woman.

However, despite Antonia's apparent absence from these illustrations, which also means the absence of even the most fleeting moments of female homoeroticism, Antonia may be seen beneath the tableaux that have been illustrated, as the work of both Castle and Medd would suggest. Medd argues that the invisible lesbian is a powerful figure because she makes visible the codes by which she is determined as unseeable:

> The recognition of lesbianism has no place in representational systems that have historically and structurally secured the power and privilege of masculinity through an exchange of women between men. Subsequently, it is not surprising that there has not been an explicit legal prohibition against lesbianism, but rather a more elusive systemic proscription of female desire and gender performance that has excluded – or foreclosed – lesbianism as a category of desire or identity. (2012, 3)

Because lesbianism has historically been prohibited in dominant discourse through strategic unseeing, denied space in popular, legal and literary consciousness by being constructed as 'unthinkable' (Ruppel's word choices remind us that this is ongoing), lesbianism has been traditionally militated against in broad, euphemistic terms. Beneath the proscription of liberated performances of female sexuality is a silent restriction against any dangerous movements that might signify the ultimate unspeakable end-point (same-sex desire) of women desiring freely. In order to see the invisible lesbian, we can therefore look to the moments of gender regulation in the illustrations of 'Freya of the Seven Isles,' in which Freya's desires are circumscribed and redirected onto white male bodies. As I argued in Chapter 1, bodily contact between Freya and Jaspar, or Freya and Heemskirk, is always mediated through the body of Antonia. Like the apparitional lesbian Castle describes, Antonia therefore haunts the moments of heteronormative contact that have been illustrated.

Freya and Jaspar

Both *The Metropolitan Magazine* and *The Golden Book* position illustrations of Freya and Jaspar alongside the text. However, while these images present the story as a heteronormative romance, emphasising stereotypical gender norms, both periodicals actually illustrate textual plot points in which Antonia is instrumental.

In *The Metropolitan Magazine*, Freya and Jaspar are depicted together (Figure 1), in a stance Davis describes as 'standing bosom to bosom in an embrace' (260). Davis views this image as portraying Freya's power, as she contends 'Ashley conveys Freya's control and greater power in comparison to Jasper by positioning her [in] front of him, thereby foregrounding her dominance' (260-261). I would argue here, however, that Freya is positioned as subordinate to Jaspar, as she appears smaller than he is, depicted as leaning against his strong frame. Freya is beautiful and slender, but more than anything, she is presented as literally unable to stand on her own two feet, something that does not resonate

Figure 1 - ‘Freya of the Seven Isles’ in *The Metropolitan Magazine*, April 1912, p. 21. Illustrated by Clifford W. Ashley

with her impressive self-possession and independence within the text. Furthermore, the comfortable romance between Freya and Jaspar, that Davis sees here when she describes them as ‘bosom to bosom,’ denies the intensity of Jaspar’s grip on Freya’s arms, a grip that restricts her discernible efforts to turn away from him.

Her posture here echoes the way she is described at the corresponding point in the text when, in an intimate moment with Jaspar, she thinks she hears someone approaching them, ‘struggle[s] a little and thr[ows] her head back’; with Jaspar holding ‘her clasped closely to his breast,’ she ‘tries to disengage herself, but [has] not the heart absolutely to push him away with her hands’ (FSI, 158). Davis reads Freya’s open eyes and turned head and shoulder in the illustration as signals of ‘her alertness to the approach of Heemskirk, the antagonist’ (261), which is also suggested by the text itself.

Yet it is important to note that this is the scene, about which I wrote in the previous chapter, in which Antonia keeps watch for Freya and Jaspar, and is thus positioned and punished as a proximate embodiment of Freya’s sexual promiscuity. We are expected to imagine that the invisible body on the periphery of the image, to which Freya turns, who occupies her attention more than the man in her arms, is Heemskirk because in terms of the plot it is his approach that worries her most. However, we know that if Heemskirk is at the edge of this image, then so is Antonia. If Freya is looking away from her heteronormative love interest in this image, towards the antagonistic Heemskirk, then she is also looking towards

Antonia, the immediate object of Heemskirk's antagonism. Thus, just as I choose to reframe the text in order to privilege contact between these women, we can also choose to reframe this image, and imagine that it is Antonia to whom Freya turns.

Figure 2 - 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *The Golden Book*, August 1930, p. 22. Illustrated by John Alan Maxwell.

Freya is also pictured alongside Jaspar in *The Golden Book* (Figure 2), in ways that place her as subordinate to the male characters; in this illustration she is constructed as little more than a figment of Jaspar's imagination, as John Alan Maxwell captures Jaspar's fantasy of eloping with Freya on his brig. Jaspar feels the brig is 'pervaded by the spirit of Freya' (FSI, 143) because it is such an integral part of the future he hopes for them. However, as I argued in Chapter 1, this heteronormative elopement plot can be reread as a site of the subversive desires of Antonia, who sees Jaspar and his boat as the means for *her* future with Freya: '"There's the brig. Captain Allen. Let us run away at once [. . .] Let us! Let us!"' (FSI, 172). Thus, even when masculine hetero-fantasies become the first thing the reader sees on the page, the narrative of lesbian desire is never quite as invisible as it is meant to be. Furthermore, if we agree with Medd's contentions, in repeatedly presenting Freya sexually, the periodicals stage the unconscionable figure of the lesbian that cannot be explicitly regulated against, but who implicitly represents the dangerous extreme of sexually animated female bodies.

Figure 3 - 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *The Metropolitan Magazine*, April 1912, p.24. Illustrated by Clifford W. Ashley.

Freya and Heemskirk

Freya's contact with Heemskirk is also prevalent in the periodical illustrations that accompany the serializations, but again in ways that persistently evoke Antonia's role in the text and her contact with Freya. In *The Metropolitan Magazine* and *The Golden Book*, when Freya is not with Jaspar, she is with Heemskirk; both periodicals depict the same moment, the aftermath of Freya hitting Heemskirk.

That neither publication illustrates the moment she actually strikes him, but rather a second later, means that they both work hard to avoid showing Freya as strong, fierce and capable of defending herself. Indeed, in *The Metropolitan Magazine*, Freya is positioned so far away from Heemskirk, that it is not necessarily clear from the image alone that it is her who has caused him to clutch his cheek (Figure 3). Davis says this illustration conveys 'the energy of the blow' (261) Freya deals Heemskirk, yet *she* is positioned as cowering from *him*; he towers above her, bear-like while she shies away from him, pretty and slim.

In *The Golden Book*, Freya's proximity to Heemskirk makes her look more like she is comforting him than smacking him (Figure 4). Furthermore, she is drawn as being in *exactly* the same posture as she is in Jaspar's fantasy (Figure 2), reiterating her role in the periodical space as a sexual object defined by men. In these images, corresponding to a moment in the text that celebrates her strength, power and above all her ability to defend herself, Freya is portrayed as dainty, weak, and as a sexual and social comfort to her predatory and violent antagonist. Even in the moment of her most explicit gender rebellion, when she literally strikes a man, she is presented as sexually available to him. Most ironically of all,

Figure 4 - 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *The Golden Book*, September 1930, p. 110. Illustrated by John Alan Maxwell.

in both images she is once again positioned as leaning, as if she cannot stand up for herself.

Moreover, in the text, Freya explicitly frames this as an act of revenge for Heemskirk's violence towards Antonia: '"I have avenged you, my girl"' (FSI, 172). Again, images that seem to most strenuously elide female agency, and the right of women to make their own sexual choices, are underwritten by the intense bond between Freya and Antonia that organizes many of the events in the story, while remaining distinctly unseeable. As much as these illustrations *sell* a story of Freya's weakness, they *tell* a story of the strength of what Antonia means to her.

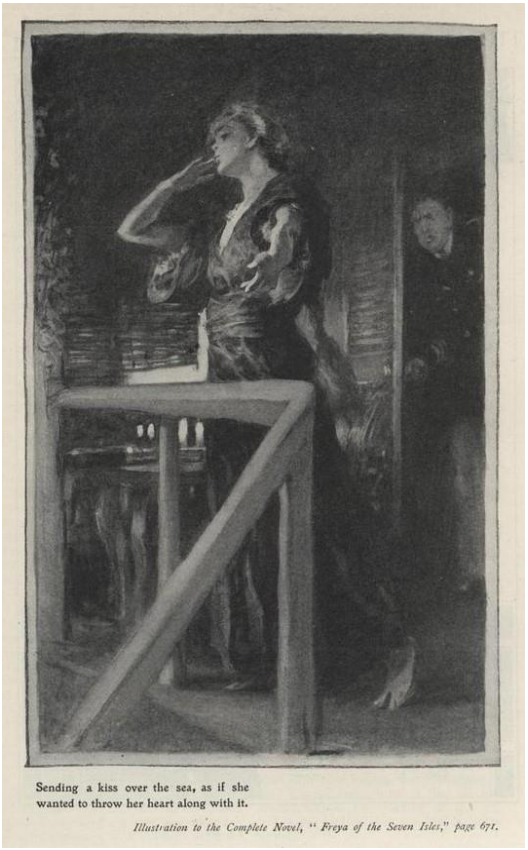

Figure 5 - 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *The London Magazine*, July 1912, p. 650. Illustration by Gilbert Holiday.

This relationship is equally written out of (while underpinning) the only illustration to accompany the story in *The London Magazine* (Figure 5). This is an ostensibly romantic image that promotes the text as one in which our heroine sends 'a kiss over the sea, as if she wanted to throw her heart along with it.' However, as Donovan argues, there is 'a disjunction between the [impression] conveyed' by this image, one of 'erotic passion', and the narrative it 'purport[s] to illustrate' (2009, 164). In fact, this image actually portrays the way Freya skilfully exploits the aggressive voyeurism of the male gaze, by enacting a dramatic performance of ultra-feminine sexuality, in order to arouse and frustrate her antagonist.

This illustration accurately corresponds to the morning after Freya strikes Heemskirk (when she spent her evening 'laughingly cr[ying] and cryingly laugh[ing]' (FSI, 172) with Antonia in her bedroom). When she steps onto her veranda in her dressing gown to watch for Jaspar passing the house in his brig and realises Heemskirk is watching her, Freya decides to antagonise him with an outlandish display of affection and desire for Jaspar. Freya is initially positioned as Heemskirk's prey: 'her feet were bare [. . .] Heemskirk had never seen her looking like this [. . .] at first he was amazed, and then he gnashed his teeth' (FSI, 173). Freya, however, is ultimately the one with all the power in this dynamic: she 'knew that he was watching her. She knew. She had seen the door move as she came out of the passage. She was aware of his eyes being on her, with scornful bitterness, with triumphant contempt' (FSI,

173). Freya uses her knowledge of his lascivious gaze to parody the promiscuity he thinks she displays, the same promiscuity that he used as his justification to hurt both herself and Antonia:

> [she] raised both beautiful white arms above her head. In that attitude of supreme cry she stood still, glowing with the consciousness of Jasper's adoration [. . .] and warmed, too, by the feeling of evil passion, the burning, covetous eyes of the other, fastened on her back. In the fervour of her love, in the caprice of her mind, and with that mysterious knowledge of masculine nature women seem to be born to, she thought: 'You are looking on – you will – you must! Then you shall see something.' She brought both her hands to her lips, then flung them out, sending a kiss over the sea, as if she wanted to throw her heart along with it on the deck of the brig. (FSI, 174)

That *The London Magazine* recasts this vengeful pose – in which Freya retools the promiscuous role Heemskirk projects onto her to perform and parody her own sexual potential – as an earnest display of feminine virtue and heteronormative adoration, reflects the way they tried to market the story, and the character of Freya in the same way as *The Metropolitan Magazine* and *The Golden Book*. The version of Freya these periodicals present and rely upon cannot be engaged in an intimate relationship with her biracial maid, and yet, for me, this relationship is the one that repeatedly underpins these visualizations of the text.

Antonia

In the only illustration that might feature Antonia, from *The Golden Book* (Figure 6), she remains difficult to identify. Not only is the female body in the image depicted as white, but it is posed in the same position in which we keep finding Freya, next to a man who looks very like Jaspar. The dress, posture, skin and hair colour, and frame of the female body here are all redolent of the way in which Freya is drawn, but the words of the caption beneath her are spoken by Antonia and the narrator in the text: '"Nobody knows I am here," she whispered. "And nobody can see us," I whispered back' (FSI, 152).

Figure 6 - 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *The Golden Book*, September 1930, p.108. Illustrated by John Alan Maxwell.

In Chapter 1, I argued that Heemskirk sees Antonia as the embodiment of Freya's dangerously free sexual practices, enacting a slippage between the women on the surface of Antonia's skin when he punishes her for the promiscuity he believes of Freya. This slippage, I argued, further emphasised Antonia's position within the erotic economy of the story; she facilitates the sexual contact between Freya and Jaspar, and represents Freya's desire for Jaspar in Heemskirk's eyes. The heteronormative roles of the

romance plot become unstable in the light of this slippage, as we are never quite sure which bodies are touching, or which are allowed to touch. This ambiguous illustration presents both Freya and Antonia as the slippery, sexually available figure here (erotically coded, open palms, heaving chest), moving in spaces from which she is forbidden, with a body with whom she must not be seen. This means that in this version of the text, accompanied by this illustration, both women embody the dangers of unregulated female sexuality. As wayward, sexually active women, both Freya and Antonia evoke the invisible lesbian, of which Medd writes, who is discernible only as the guarded-against extreme of sexually liberated women in a paranoid heteropatriarchy. That it is not even clear when she is being represented, shows the way Antonia's presence in this story is perpetually denied in these periodical spaces. However, it also exposes the mechanisms by which the desiring lesbian body is obscured in early twentieth century mainstream culture. Given this context, it is all the more surprising that the illustrations that accompany *The Rescue*, in contrast, emphatically stage the invisible lesbian.

Edith and Immada

The Rescue was serialized in the weekly British magazine *Land and Water* between January and July 1919, over the course of 27 instalments. Unlike the illustrations that accompany the various periodical forms of 'Freya of the Seven Isles', Maurice W. Greiffenhagen's illustrations of *The Rescue* actually emphasise the female homoerotic tension of the text.

In December 1918, Conrad wrote to the editor of *Land and Water* to lament the 'sheer disloyalty' of the initial illustrations of *The Rescue* by Dudley Hardy to his 'artistic conception' (CL 6, 329). Sixteen years after Greiffenhagen illustrated 'Typhoon' in *Pall Mall Magazine*, Conrad wrote 'For some of [my illustrators], like Mr. Maurice Greiffenhagen [. . .], I have preserved to this day a sentiment of real gratitude for the sympathy of workmanship, for the honest effort to render in another medium – if not all the details or even the hard facts, then the spirit of my conception' (CL 6, 327). There is something in Greiffenhagen's illustrations, Conrad's words suggest, that speaks not just to 'the hard facts' but the very spirit of his work, an essence that means Conrad sees these drawings as his own work translated into a visual language, rendered 'in another medium.'

Conrad's consternation at Hardy's illustrations of *The Rescue*, and his praise of Greiffenhagen, have been written about often. Davis refers to this letter in order to talk about Conrad's satisfaction with the illustrators at *The Metropolitan Magazine* (262-263). For Tucker, it provides broader support for her contentions regarding publishing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; she argues Conrad's appreciation of Greiffenhagen reflects a widespread pattern during the period in which 'authors routinely adapted their work to the changing demands of audience and medium' (10-11). Others, such as Linda Dryden and Susan Jones respectively, take Greiffenhagen's illustrations themselves as the focus of their research.

Writing on his illustrations for 'Typhoon', Dryden contends that 'a detailed examination of some of these drawings highlights the attention to textual interpretation that is a hallmark of Greiffenhagen's style, a style of which Conrad evidently approved' (2009, 144). Like Osborne, Dryden values the periodical context in terms of how Conrad felt about it. The 'attention to textual interpretation' she finds engaging in Greiffenhagen's drawings is justified as the focus of her research solely because it is 'a style of which Conrad evidently approved.' Conrad's strident support for Greiffenhagen does draw attention to the images the artist created, sanctifying them as authentic representations of whatever it is Conrad was trying to convey, and as such they become tempting sources of study for those readers (like me) drawn to and touched by Conrad's enigmatic writing. This narrative of how Greiffenhagen came to illustrate *The Rescue* glorifies these images, imbuing them with the gloss of Conrad's endorsement and making them something to look out for, for the interested periodical scholar. Because of Conrad's seal of approval, they become almost canonical, validated as constituting as close a representation to Conrad's literary aesthetic as any illustration is likely to achieve.

However, finding value in these images squarely because Conrad also found value in them denies the disruptive potential of the periodical setting. As I explained earlier, what Beetham calls the 'radical heterogeneity' (11) of this context undermines the mythology of the author-God. Greiffenhagen's illustrations of *The Rescue* in *Land and Water*, as well as the serial form more generally, destabilise our experience of the text as a neat, cogent, lexical product with one stable, creative voice. While it is compelling to think about what Greiffenhagen's images may have meant to Conrad, it is equally important to think about how those images may have shaped readerly experiences of the text. We should be asking what the images reveal about the text that may be obscured by the other discourses working upon it, such as those most sticky associations attached to Conrad's legacy and canonical status. The illustrations to *The Rescue* provide us with another medium through which to engage with this text, not its author.

In this way, my approach is closer to that of Jones than Dryden. Again, writing about the 'Typhoon' illustrations, Jones argues that 'unlike most illustrators of the period, Greiffenhagen rarely places the focus of the incident at the centre of the frame [. . .] characters always occupy peripheral spaces, and the eye is drawn to the gaps foregrounded in the picture plane, matching to some extent Conrad's narratorial experiments with textual gaps' (2005, 201). Jones values Greiffenhagen's visual work because of the way it approximates Conrad's textual style, as the gaps in the text materialise in the illustrations. Significantly, it is the gaps in Conrad's work that have enabled me to construct the narratives I seek out throughout this thesis – 'one writes only half the book; the other half is with the reader' (LCG, 46) – and it is in the gaps in Greiffenhagen's work that I recognize this narrative anew. Here the 'invisible lesbian' is staged in the middle of the periodical text, clear-as-day on my queer screen.

I focus here on three specific illustrations, for the instalments from the March 27th, May 1st and May 8th 1919 issues respectively, corresponding with particular moments in the text that have been important to my reading of the novel. As there is only one illustration per instalment, each taking up a full page, the images are a striking marker of the space the text occupies in the periodical, and imbue these textual moments with greater meaning, as they represent the primary contact the reader has with each instalment of the text. These three images are the only illustrations in which Immada and Edith are placed together, reflecting the only textual moments in which they are placed together too. Each image emphasises the intensity and passion of their contact, dramatizes the female homoerotic gaze, and highlights the patriarchal and colonial mechanisms that keep them apart.

March 27th 1919

Though the caption that accompanies the illustration for the March 27th instalment of *The Rescue* corresponds to dialogue between Lingard and Edith (Figure 7), it is clear that it is 'the grip of an intimate contact' between Immada and Edith, when 'their dissimilar and inquiring glances met, seemed to touch, clasp, hold each other' (R, 122), that is being staged here. Indeed, Jones, quoting the same sentences, contends 'the intensity of the exchange is reaffirmed by its repetition, outside the text, in the illustration to the relevant instalment in *Land and Water*' (2001, 189).

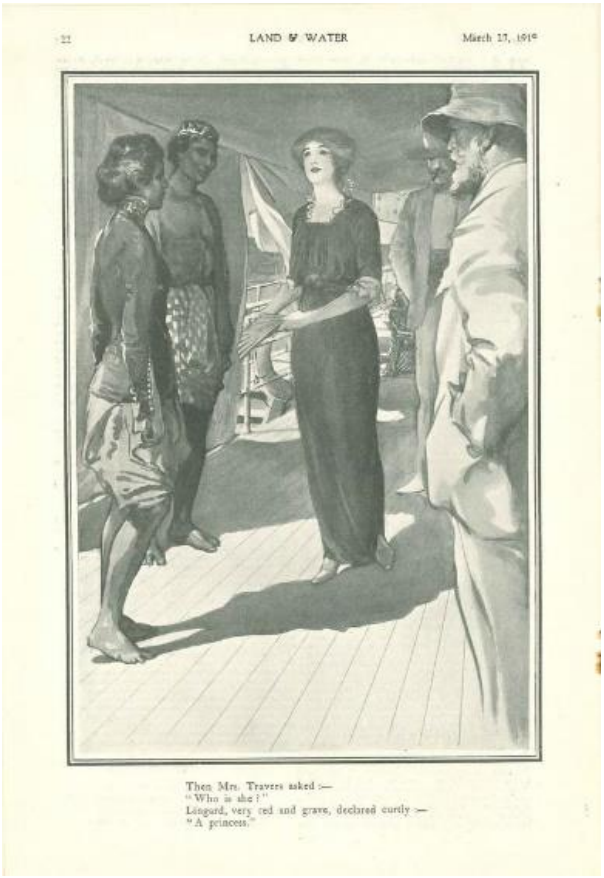

Figure 7 - *The Rescue* in *Land and Water*, March 27th 1919, p. 22, Illustrated by Maurice W. Greiffenhagen.

The significance of this moment in the text – in which two women gaze upon each other with ferocity (even enmity on Immada's part), but undeniable passion – is in the way it becomes a tiny pocket of unspoken female homoerotic desire in a text that is mostly animated by the movements of white men and one white woman. In the text, this is a breathing space, however fleeting, in which the agency and gaze of a woman of colour matters. Finding it here in the digital periodical archive, stumbling across it writ large on my laptop screen, thus becomes another moment, like Mussell standing in the

darkened stacks, where I am connected to the past, where I can see myself and my world in a canon that was not designed for my recognition.

The image itself heightens the eroticism of this moment, as Immada and Edith are depicted looking at each other (eyes only for each other), with open bodies and skin exposed. Unlike Freya who is repeatedly depicted as leaning, sometimes on men, as if to deny the extent to which she can stand on her own two feet, both Edith and Immada stand alone, holding themselves up but leaning towards each other, both poised to take a step to bridge the distance between them. Indeed, this space is already breached by Immada's shadow, as it falls across Edith's feet. 'The grip of an intimate contact' is thus actualised by Greiffenhagen here as a form of bodily contact; or in other words (to evoke Castle's 'apparitional lesbian'), Edith and Immada touch in the shadows.

Furthermore, that this shadow space between them occupies the centre of the image, the same space that has been foreclosed by Conrad criticism that calls them doubles of each other (GoGwilt, 81), suggests that reading Conrad in this context means being able to see female homoeroticism in his work that is not always discernible when encountering 'Conrad' through the lens of his sticky canonical associations. This image suggests that even if the potency of Edith and Immada's 'grip of an intimate contact' is denied by Conrad scholarship, as I argued in Chapter 1, it is afforded an undeniable platform within this periodical setting. It exists in the periodical space even if it is not allowed to exist in canonical space. Engaging with the periodical setting thus changes the resonance of the text, highlighting certain narratives, making certain bodies visible, and, in Ahmed's words, putting certain 'bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality' (2014a, 165). In this way, the digital periodical archive, through my computer screen, becomes a site and sight of the queer pleasures Ahmed describes.

May 1st 1919

Greiffenhagen's illustration for the May 1st instalment of *The Rescue* similarly emphasises the space between Edith and Immada, the intensity of their connection, and the patriarchal and cultural codes that keep them apart (Figure 8). This image corresponds to a passage I wrote about in Chapter 1, that I argued reflects the way the passion of their first encounter becomes transmuted into rivalry for the attention of Lingard, the appropriate object of desire for each of them according to heteronormative paradigms. In the text, before the passage quoted in the caption here, Immada succumbs to Hassim's physical restraints: 'She struggled a little like a snared bird and submitted, hiding her face on his shoulder' (R, 183). In Greiffenhagen's rendering, however, she is drawn in a state of perpetual struggle. She is still fighting against the patriarchal restraints that silence her and keep her away from Edith; she will not submit.

Figure 8 - *The Rescue* in *Land and Water*, May 1st 1919, p.25. Illustrated by Greiffenhagen.

Again, she is turned towards Edith; again, they lean into each other, across the body of Lingard, and against the pull of Hassim; again, they have eyes only for each other. The role of Lingard as interlocutor, literally standing between them mediating their contact, is emphasised here, as if they can only lean into each other if it looks like they are leaning towards him. In this way, the image reminds me of Ahmed's contentions in *Queer Phenomenology*, in which she writes 'Compulsory heterosexuality diminishes the very capacity of bodies to reach what is off the straight line. It shapes which bodies one "can" legitimately approach as would-be lovers and which one cannot' (2006, 91). Immada and Edith are allowed to turn towards each other, veering off the straight line by which functional heterosexual bodies are meant to be oriented, if there is an appropriate object of desire, a male body, that they appear to be converging towards. This also explains the way Freya is constantly drawn leaning on men to stress the heteronormative patterns of the plot. Analysing the body language of Edith and Immada here even further, Immada appears to be drawn into, open palm gesturing towards, Edith's crotch, with Edith's hands crossed over it as if to deny the very possibility of this pull.

Once again, the periodical context highlights the relationship between Edith and Immada, framing it is as central to the machinations of the plot when it is, in fact, a relatively marginal aspect of the story. In Greiffenhagen's images, the invisible figure of the lesbian comes sharply into focus, unavoidably noteworthy in the middle of my screen.

May 8th 1919

In the following instalment, published May 8th 1919, we find the illustration that best exemplifies the exaggerated emphasis Greiffenhagen seems to place on this relationship (Figure 9). Here, Greiffenhagen makes explicit Immada's involvement in Edith's decision to accompany Lingard in his attempts to rescue Mr Travers and d'Alcacer. The most frenetic image of the three, this illustration is also the one that veers furthest from the 'hard facts' of the text.

The caption suggests it corresponds to Edith's announcement '"I am coming with you," declared Mrs. Travers suddenly in a tone of unalterable decision. [. . .] Carter had cried: "You can't Mrs Travers!" [. . .] Carter started forward. – "You don't know this man," he almost shouted' (R, 197). But by explicitly including Immada as part of this scene, leaning towards Edith over Carter's shoulder, this image also appears to stage the moment from the previous page where Lingard says goodbye as he prepares to leave the cabin and go ashore on his own:

> It seemed to him that he was saying good-bye to all the world, that he was taking a last leave of his own self. Mrs. Travers did not say a word, but Immada threw herself between them and cried: 'You are a cruel woman! You are driving him away from where his strength is. You put madness into his heart, O! Blind – without pity – without shame! . . .'
>
> 'Immada,' said Hassim's calm voice. Nobody moved.
>
> 'What did she say to me?' faltered Mrs. Travers and again repeated in a voice that sounded hard, 'What did she say?'
>
> 'Forgive her,' said Lingard. 'Her fears are for me . . .' – 'It's about your going?' Mrs. Travers interrupted, swiftly. (R, 196)

In Greiffenhagen's image, the effect Immada has on Edith is made explicit; she is presented as beseeching Edith in the same stance as Carter. Edith, depicted in the act of leaving, is thus presented as being motivated not by a wish to accompany Lingard, but by a concern for what Immada thinks about her. Immada's outcry is portrayed as happening in the very moment of Edith's bravery, thus looking like an appeal. Consequently, this image, visualizing a major plot point, is illustrated as a charged and significant encounter between the two women, indeed, one in which the words of a woman of colour, and the amount this woman means to the other, inflects the outcome of the narrative.

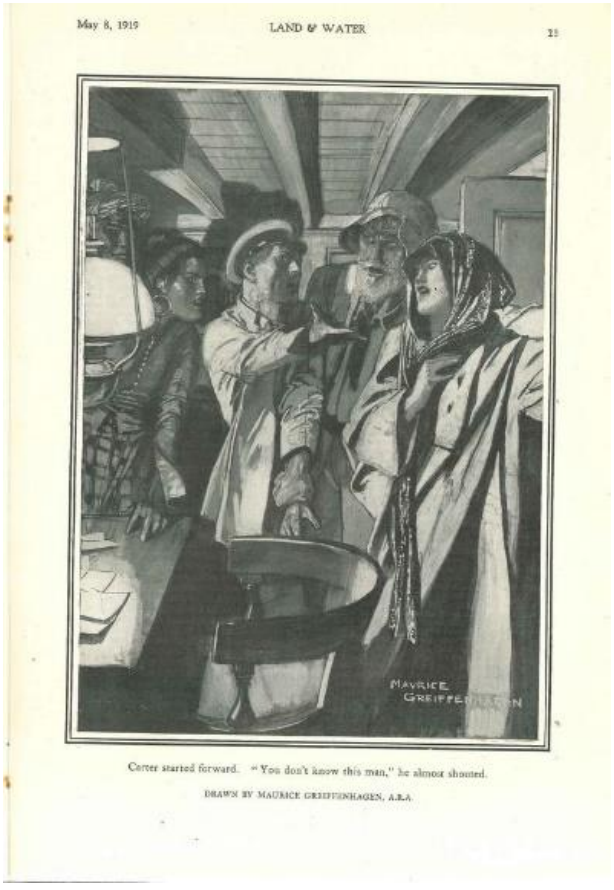

Figure 9 - *The Rescue* in *Land and Water*, May 8th 1919, p. 25, Illustrated by Greiffenhagen.

In evoking two textual moments as if they are happening in the same instant, Immada's outcry and Edith's decision, the image transports the moment Edith and Immada are in direct contact, when 'Immada threw herself between' Edith and Lingard, into the moment that 'Carter started forward'. This means the image comes to emphasise the white male bodies that

keep moving between these women, keeping them apart and preventing them from ever quite touching. Edith and Immada frame this illustration, highlighting the gulf between them and the way it is packed with the regulatory bodies of shouting white men. The contact between Edith and Immada, which is actually fairly limited within the text, is repeatedly dramatized in Greiffenhagen's illustrations, so that the figure of the invisible lesbian that is occluded both within and outside of the text, is made visible on my queer screen.

The digital periodical archive is a space uniquely equipped to make the invisible lesbian visible, reconceptualising Conrad's texts as products of mass culture and a popular literary market, rather than as high-brow, sanctified, untouchable works of the canon. The specific materiality of the computer screen, as a site and sight of the queer pleasures Ahmed describes when bodies that have been kept apart are allowed to come together, enables me to read the illustrations that accompanied 'Freya of the Seven Isles' and *The Rescue* in their early twentieth century periodical incarnations in ways that draw attention to the elided lesbian figure. While the illustrations of 'Freya of the Seven Isles' deny the possibility of the female homoeroticism between Freya and Antonia, by denying the existence of Antonia, they cannot erase her completely, as the repeated images of heteronormative romance perpetually invoke her role in Freya's life. Hiding beneath every image, as an invisible figure that organizes and animates the bodies depicted, Antonia's absence exposes the processes that make her unseeable. The images that accompany *The Rescue*, meanwhile, illustrate an alternative narrative to the text in which the contact between Edith and Immada, their attraction (their literal pull towards one another) and the intensity of their feelings, are all staged within the pages of the periodical context as organizers of the plot. Thus, the digital space of the periodical archive, the materiality of my queer screen, empowers me to put bodies into contact for the purpose of queer pleasure. It helps me once again to see homosexuality where there isn't any, to see what I am not supposed to have seen, or in other words, it helps me to look for trouble.

Part 2: She's Not Coloured

I am the first speaker, on the first panel, of the first day of a conference in an unfamiliar British city, and I'm nervous. I spend the night before in my hotel room trying to fathom bus timetables for the route to the university, which are confusing and contradictory. On the bus to the conference, I see a street sign I recognise from the timetable; before I've worked out that it's not the same street, I'm off the bus several stops too early. I have about 10 minutes to get to the venue which my phone tells me is a 35-minute walk away. I call a taxi company, but I don't really know where I am. Miraculously, one drives past as I'm on the phone, I flag it down and arrive at the venue, purple in the face but just about on time.

What feels like two minutes later, still a bit out of breath, I present a sketched-out version of the following two chapters. I argue that Aïssa, the main female character in *An Outcast of the Islands*, is whitewashed on the pulp paperback covers of the 1950s and 60s editions, and I explore the significance of her being illustrated like this in such a popular format when she is such a prominent, eloquent agent in the novel itself. About 17 minutes in, I panic about my timings and skip out a crucial paragraph, but otherwise I am relatively proud of my performance, given the drama of the morning. As I wait for the Q&A at the end of the panel, I congratulate myself for having persevered. There was a brief minute where I'd considered giving up and retreating to the hotel to watch *Homes Under the Hammer*; I tell myself anything else I do today is a bonus.

Then I am asked a question by a white British female Professor who is older than I am, who works at the university, who has been involved in organising the conference and who seems to know everyone there (unlike me). She foregoes conference etiquette – the always welcome 'thank you for your paper' – and dives in: 'I've taught a lot of Malay-Arabs [Aïssa's ethnicity] and I don't think she is whitewashed on those covers.'

Her tone is scornful. You'll note there is no question here, just confrontation, but I am expected to answer anyway. I say, 'Oh that's interesting, thank you for that' (because *I* didn't leave my manners on the bus that morning) and, floundering only a little, I ask 'how do you suggest I use this in my research?' No response, so I continue: 'Because obviously my line of argument is that her racial identity is neutralised by these covers. She's presented as a woman of colour in the text. Her relationship to whiteness is very complicated.'

Here, I refer back to the textual examples I've just presented in which she is repeatedly positioned as an exotic 'Other'. I have deliberately applied to present at conferences that reflect the broader themes of my research, like feminism and queer theory, in an ongoing effort to detach 'Conrad' from his sticky canonical associations. This means I have avoided presenting my work to audiences of Conrad specialists, and am therefore prepared to explicate Aïssa's specific role in the novel at this particular conference, because I imagine I'm probably

the only person here who's read *An Outcast of the Islands*. I am wrong, as the Professor quickly informs me.

'Well I didn't think she was like that in the book.' Of course, you've read the book, I think, of course you like Conrad, and of course you need everyone here to know you're the expert. 'She's not coloured! Malay-Arabs aren't coloured, I've taught a lot of them and they're more . . . they're a little bit . . . yellow. Like that second cover you showed us.'

Silence. I think I can see people shifting uncomfortably in their seats, but no one makes a sound. Eventually, I stumble over the lamest of responses: 'Well, as a white scholar, I'm not going to get into the dodgy colonial politics of grading other people's skin tones.' Why, in this agonising moment, I decided to suddenly identify as a 'scholar,' particularly when the smartest word I could think of was 'dodgy', is beyond me. I continue with even less gusto, 'I obviously disagree, because as I said my whole line of argument is about Aïssa's relationship to whiteness, and her not being white, but I think it's really interesting that we can both read the same book and see it so differently.' I smile at her and hope the carpeted conference floor will swallow me whole, so I can think of alternative career paths in peace.

The chair of the panel asked for other questions, and everyone moved on while I wondered what I'd said or done to suggest I'd be alright with such overtly racist language. When the Professor used my words, 'of colour', to speak her prejudice, 'coloured', she told me that my decision to work on Conrad was a decision to work for that lexicon, to welcome it into academic spaces as legitimate and acceptable, or rather to perpetuate its supposed legitimacy and acceptability in these spaces. Because of my own sense of insecurity within that space (because I'd already proven that I couldn't handle a bus timetable, let alone rigorous academic debate), my response became a defence of my work and of myself. I was strengthening and justifying my position at the table, when I should have been toppling it: 'I think it's really interesting that we can both read the same book and read it so differently.' Dodgy indeed.

I sat at the front of the room trying not to cry, listening to the other questions for the other panellists, and thought about the excellent daytime TV I could be watching instead and whether I had the right A levels to become a dentist. But as the day wore on, I was approached by several supportive colleagues (all fellow postgraduate students) who told me I'd handled the situation well and that they hoped it wouldn't happen to them. It was almost as if this type of humiliation was a familiar and expected part of their conference experience, a rite of passage in this culture.

I was encouraged to discover that a new generation of academics, working on innovative, inclusive projects (revolving around concepts like 'respect' and 'compassion'), were kind and engaging. By the end of the day I'd forgotten about dentistry and was thinking of myself as a real academic, someone who could change things, because I'd been challenged, and I'd manage to look like I was able to respond to that challenge without fear or hesitation. I would come to think of it as one of the most productive experiences of my entire

PhD, and, much later, to decide that I should write about it. I was already writing about it whenever I wrote about Aïssa, because I kept remembering the time when my research was constituted as a space in which two white people were allowed to debate how not-white a fictional character could be before she ceased to be deemed ‘Conradian’.

I have chosen to write about this here to hold this conference culture accountable because it shouldn’t be expected or familiar for anyone, and to hold the Professor accountable for her rudeness – I wonder if she knows how hard it was for me to present that day, or how much her words derailed me – but also to hold myself accountable for my complicity. The work I presented created an atmosphere in which someone felt it was acceptable to label certain bodies as not belonging in Conradian space and, more significantly, conference space. I felt aggrieved by the silence that followed her words, as if it was me that was harmed by what she was saying, as if I was the one who was alone, isolated and excluded, rather than anyone in that room who wasn’t white. She used my words to mark the bodies that she thought should sit comfortably in that space, and those that should not. In doing so, she taught me to be more conscious of my decision to study Conrad; this is what happens when you bring him up in conversation. ‘Conradian’ ‘cultural air’ can be unexpectedly policed and decidedly racist. Aïssa is not ‘coloured’; she is not ‘a little bit yellow’; she is Conradian.

Chapter 3: Aïssa: Agency, Race and the Articulation of Desire in *An Outcast of the Islands*

After first establishing the discourses of racial panic that inflect conventional codes of imperial sexuality, I argue in this chapter that Aïssa performs her role within an interracial relationship in subversive ways that trouble the racial hierarchies of colonialism. Beyond this, I contend that *An Outcast of the Islands* provides the narrative space for Aïssa to articulate her desires and anxieties, as she represents a perspective on imperial sexuality that is regularly ignored or written out of the colonial archive, that of a woman of colour. Throughout, I choose to think of Aïssa as the text's protagonist, and certainly the star of this chapter.

Sex and Empire

David Spurr states the orthodox position of sex in imperial rhetoric, when he writes 'The allegorization of colonized nations in terms of the female *figure* (bodily, rhetorical) has been a cliché of colonial history' (emphasis original, 171). Whether the white male colonial hero is penetrating virgin forests, or scaling 'Sheba's breasts' in search of buried treasure (as in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*), the colonial landscape of British imperial literature is eroticized and feminized so that imperial conquest reads as sexual conquest, and the hero's victory is as much a validation of his supposed virile masculinity as his putative racial supremacy. Summarizing the late nineteenth century colonial romance formula of 'authors such as R.M. Ballantyne, G.E. Henty, and Captain Marryat', Mariadele Boccardi places 'Christian manliness' at its centre; English masculinity in the imperial literary canon was traditionally negotiated through the domination of foreign cultural and geographical terrain (25). Spurr argues the sexualization of this lexicon stratified social and political power in colonial cultures: 'In this rhetorical strategy, differences in power are reformulated as gender difference, and colonization is naturalized as the relation between the sexes' (172). Gender and sexuality underwrite the binary divisions that empower European imperial discourses, agents and cultures, as 'natural' systems of power.

Ann Stoler argues that sexual codes inflected the most foundational dichotomous identifications and classifications upon which colonial cultures were formed: 'the very categories of "colonizer" and "colonized" were secured through forms of sexual control which defined the domestic arrangements of Europeans and the cultural investments by which they identified themselves' (1989, 635). The social scaffolding that defined the life of Europeans in imperial spaces, according to Stoler, were always already structured through dynamics of sexuality and gendered power. Beyond the rhetorical clichés then, sex in the Empire forcefully constructed the tracks in which differentially marked bodies in colonial spaces were permitted to move, as Stoler maintains:

> the colonial politics of exclusion, was contingent on constructing categories, legal and social classifications designating who was 'white,' who was 'native,' who could become a citizen rather than a subject, which children were legitimate progeny and which were not. What mattered were not only one's physical properties but who counted as 'European' and by what measure. Skin shade was too ambiguous; bank accounts were mercurial; religious belief and education were crucial but never enough. Social and legal standing derived not only from colour, but from the silences, acknowledgments, and denials of the social circumstances in which one's parents had sex [. . .] (1989, 635)

Where, when and how one's parents had sex determined one's subjectivity, citizenship, and legitimacy as a person. Colonial culture, Stoler contends, was emphatically structured through sexual relationships (particularly interracial ones), delimiting racial categories, thereby power, civil rights, mobility, and, fundamentally, who *counted* (as European, as 'colonizer', as agent). According to Stoler, the discourse of miscegenation wrote the racial codes that shaped colonial cultures.

Robert Young argues this is because this discourse implied the undoing of putatively pure narratives of 'European-ness': 'Each new racial ramification of miscegenation traced an historical trajectory that betrayed a narrative of conquest, absorption and inevitable decline' (169). Young reads miscegenation and its effects as signs of racial mixing that challenged Western imperial narratives of ordered, coherent white purity. He goes on to argue that the paranoia of indigenous oversexualization was most extreme in relation to miscegenation, and the apparent degenerative racial dilution that imperial powers expected to ensue:

> As racial theories show in their unrelenting attempt to assert inalienable differences between races, this extraordinary vision of an unbounded 'delicious fecundity', in Virginia Woolf's phrase, only took on significance through its voyeuristic tableau of frenzied, interminable copulation, of couplings, fusing, coalescence, *between races*. At its core, such racial theory projected a phantasmagoria of the desiring machine as a people factory: a Malthusian fantasy of uncontrollable, frenetic fornication producing the countless motley varieties of interbreeding, with the miscegenated offspring themselves then generating an ever-increasing *mélange,* 'mongrelity', of self-propagating endlessly diversifying hybrid progeny: half-blood, half-caste, half-breed, cross-breed, amalgamate, intermix, miscegenate; alvino, cabre, cafuso, castizo, cholo, chino, cob, creole, dustee, fustee, griffe, mamaluco, marabout, mestee, mestindo, mestizo, mestize, metifo, misterado, mongrel, morisco, mule, mulat, mulatto, mulatta, mulattress, mustafina, mustee, mustezoes, ochavon, octavon, octoroon, puchuelo, quadroon, quarteron, quatralvi, quinteron, saltatro, terceron, zambaigo, zambo, zambo prieto . . . (emphasis original, 171)

Young's snowballing prose indicates the multiplying multiplicity of racial identities propagating anxious narratives of miscegenation in nineteenth and early twentieth century imperial ideology. His and Stoler's contentions on interracial relationships gesture towards not only the fundamental significance of 'the social circumstances in which one's parents had sex' (Stoler, 1989, 635), but also the challenge to imperial regulation – dependent on racial demarcation

and colonial discourse built on secure binaries – posed by the potential swelling of new ethnicities.

Fear of miscegenation was infused with fear of degeneration in colonial and Social Darwinist rhetoric of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Rod Edmond notes: 'Racial theory, with its insistence on the purity and supremacy of Aryan races, implied the inevitability of decline as races and cultures mixed and reproduced' (40). In the colonial lexicon of white supremacy, racial 'mixing' connoted inexorable social decay, as distinct racial identities were apparently eroded. Edmond continues: 'One of the most vivid and repeated expressions of the fear of degeneration in colonial settings was the phenomenon of "going native", of the European becoming decivilised in the savage surroundings' (43). The anxiety surrounding degeneracy was an anxiety about the imagined dissolution of European integrity, the symbolic collapse of Western distinction, and the presumed contagion of imperial spaces: 'Empires, it was feared, could bite back, infecting the hand that held the Bible, the gun and the dollar' (Edmond, 44). It is this dissolution of imperial boundaries that Edmond suggests was at the heart of European panic: '[Degeneration] became the place where metropolitan and imperial spheres met, and where concerns about home and away were most sharply focused' (45). The colonial project depended on the apparently delineated binaries that separated the supposedly safe 'home space' from the seemingly alien 'elsewhere' of Empire.

Thus, the fear of degeneracy can be read as a discourse that registers the 'health' of white society, as much as one that works to legitimise fear of the Other. Indeed, Stoler argues it delimited European identity:

> Notions of degeneracy registered dissension among Europeans and basic uncertainties about who would be granted that privileged status. Thus, in the Dutch Indies, 'degenerate' was an adjective that invariably preceded those labelled as poor and white. [. . .] this was not a 'European' disorder or a specifically colonial one, but a 'mobile' discourse of empire that designated eligibility for citizenship, class membership and gendered assignments to race. (1995, 32)

Ideas of degeneracy did not apply exclusively to those most exposed to the threat of 'going native', but rather expanded to constitute the boundaries of whiteness. Miscegenation, and its connotations of degeneracy, therefore underpinned the central definitions of what it was to be European in colonial cultures, as the defining barrier that white identity could not transgress. Colonial power roles were not only singularly demarcated by skin colour, but ingrained by the codes of sexuality. *An Outcast of the Islands* exemplifies the ways in which bodies were organised in imperial spaces through and beyond negotiable, negotiated racial identities.

The novel tells the story of an interracial relationship between an obnoxious Dutch man, Willems, and a Malay-Arab woman, Aïssa. After disgracing himself in Macassar by embezzling funds from the Dutch merchant firm for which he works, and leaving his biracial wife Joanna, Willems follows his English mentor Captain Lingard to the settlement of Sambir, on the Pantai river in Borneo, where Lingard has a trade monopoly due to his unique ability to navigate the river. Willems joins Dutchman Almayer, Lingard's Sambir representative, in

Lingard and Co.'s trading post. After meeting Aïssa, he renounces his European ties by betraying Lingard's navigational secrets to his Arab rival Abdulla, thus breaking his monopoly. Eventually, Willems grows tired of Aïssa but when he tries to leave her to reunite with Joanna, she shoots him with his own gun and kills him.

The overarching plot machinations may explain why prevailing scholarship of the text positions Aïssa as a stereotypical gothic femme fatale. Linda Dryden argues Aïssa's significance in the text is solely as seductress: 'Aïssa is central to the novel *as the temptation* that leads Willems to abandon his "father" [Lingard] and his racial identity' (emphasis added, 2000, 94). Dryden goes on to read Aïssa's narrative role as a sign that 'Conrad endorses the white male stereotype of imperial romance where women are treacherous: they are all Delilahs. The "native" woman is especially dangerous' (2000, 98). Rebecca Stott similarly describes Aïssa's role in terms of tropical temptress, whose desirability threatens the very core of imperial ideology: '*Under Aïssa's seductive spell*, Willems begins to feel his gradual slide into destruction as a slippage [. . .] For Willems this is not a personal fall but a fall for Western civilisation, a terrible regression and a surrender to the forces of barbarism' (emphasis added, 145). Dryden and Stott both write about Aïssa in conjunction with the Orientalist trope of the exotic siren who intoxicates the colonial agent, and thus poisons the entire colonial project.

This becomes a sticky lexicon that attaches itself to Aïssa as she materializes in Conrad scholarship; even critics like Harry Sewlall, who argues that her narrative role counters this trope, slip into this vocabulary. Sewlall contends that 'in a subversion of the stereotypical image of the docile savage woman over whom the civilized Western man wields his power, Aïssa is given a powerful voice that even stuns Lingard into silence' (87). But despite suggesting that Aïssa is a significant character in her own right, with her own voice, who represents more than the colonial cliché of the Othered femme fatale, Sewlall still describes her as Willems' 'Malaysian paramour [. . .] who has *enslaved* him with her beauty' (emphasis added, 87). As I will argue later in the chapter, while the text does stage Willems' feeling that he is 'surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization' (OI, 72), there is equal textual evidence attesting to his pursuit of Aïssa and her enforced subordination under his violent control. If anyone is enslaved in this novel, it is Aïssa. Sewlall's choice to characterise their relationship in terms of Aïssa metaphorically enslaving Willems 'with her beauty', ignores the gendered colonial power dynamic between them and demonstrates how women of colour are written out of the colonial literary canon when we, as readers, fail to privilege the perspectives of these characters. I will redress this representation of Aïssa in Conrad scholarship by exploring the textual breathing spaces in which she speaks to us, as well as to other characters in the novel, about her desires, her racial identity and her cultural anxieties. First, however, I will interrogate the moments in the text that have led to her prevailing assignation in literary criticism as the exotic femme fatale.

'The Very Spirit of that Land'

The orthodox feminization and sexualization of the colonial landscape Spurr and Boccardi describe underwrite Willems' first encounter with Aïssa, when he meets her in one of Sambir's forests:

> Who was she? Where did she come from? Wonderingly he took his eyes off her face to look round at the serried trees of the forest that stood big and still and straight, as if watching him and her breathlessly. He had been baffled, repelled, almost frightened by the intensity of that tropical life [. . .] He had been frightened by the vague perception of danger before, but now, as he looked at that life again, his eyes seemed able to pierce the fantastic veil of creepers and leaves, to look past the solid trunks, to see through the forbidding gloom – and the mystery was disclosed – enchanting, subduing, beautiful. He looked at the woman. Through the checkered [sic] light between them she appeared to him with the impalpable distinctness of a dream. The very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him like an apparition behind a transparent veil – a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows. (OI, 64)

This passage, replete with the colonial male gaze that begins as questioning desire for the mysterious Other, is textbook eroticizing imperial rhetoric. Threatened by the phallic trees of the forest, Willems suddenly perceives the key to controlling the fecund, disordered world in which he finds himself: 'the mystery was disclosed [. . .] The very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him'. This evokes Joanna De Groot's contention that women were conventionally figured, in nineteenth century European artistic depictions, as access points for white men, neutralising the alterity of 'far-away' cultures: 'women were presented as the *means* for imagining or finding out about the Orient' (emphasis original, 105). Willems sees Aïssa here as the penetrable embodiment of a culture and geography that he has failed to command thus far. This passage also resonates with Spurr's writing on the British colonial euphemism for an African mistress, 'sleeping dictionary'; just as 'sexual knowledge of her body is knowledge of Africa itself' (Spurr, 171) for British colonizers, sexual conquest of Aïssa represents cultural conquest of Sambir for Willems. Aïssa is so inextricably connected to this 'wilderness' under Willems' gaze that he turns to the land for her origin story, and in turn uses his visual mastery over her to 'pierce the fantastic veil' of that baffling, forbidding, gloomy 'tropical life.' His triumph is as much a validation of his virility, initially undermined by the 'solid trunks', as his racial, colonial prowess.

Aïssa, on the other hand, is rendered more insubstantial the longer he looks at her: 'a dream'; 'an apparition'; a veil 'of sunbeams and shadows.' Stott argues that racial distinctions underwrite depictions like this of women of colour in Conrad's work; opposed to the clearly delineated outlines of white men such as Jim in *Lord Jim*: 'black bodies, and particularly female black bodies, are pictured in Conrad's fiction enveloped in twilight, foliage and wilderness, fragmented and dissolved by the light' (131). This shadowy version of Aïssa that Willems envisages further entrenches the cultural differences between them, othering her while solidifying his own substantiated subject position as the one who gazes. The text makes

explicit, not only the sexual, gendered impulse of colonial power, but crucially the extent to which this version of Aïssa is wholly constructed by Willems' fantasy of domination. As 'the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests' she materialises in his eyes as an apparition, his dream that only he can see.

Later in the text, her alignment with the colonial landscape is also reiterated by Lingard:

> as she stood solitary in the unnatural and threatening twilight of the murky day, with everything unchanged around her, she appeared to Lingard as if she had been made there, on the spot, out of the black vapours of the sky and of the sinister gleams of feeble sunshine that struggled, through the thickening clouds, into the colourless desolation of the world. (OI, 200)

As the ultimate menace to Lingard's homosocial relationship with Willems (who betrayed him to convince Aïssa of his devotion), Lingard does not see Aïssa as the erotic embodiment of Sambir's forests, as Willems does. It is a different landscape that she personifies for Lingard, not one to be conquered, but one that is forsaken. This reflects Lingard's relation to Sambir at this point in the novel, just as Aïssa's figuration as 'spirit of that land of mysterious forests' under Willems' gaze reflects the way he sees Sambir as a site/sight of potential colonial, erotic, exotic fantasy at the beginning of the novel. The landscape is desolate to Lingard because it no longer 'belongs' to him, as Willems has betrayed his navigational secrets to Abdulla by this point in the narrative. Aïssa has materialised out of the hidden darkness enveloping his beautiful paradise, to stand before him and his view of the world, just as she has sprung up to stand between him and Willems. Both the main male characters that most closely occupy the role of colonizer in *An Outcast of the Islands* pejoratively perceive Aïssa as an embodiment of the landscape, dehumanising and reducing her to images of their erotic/exotic fantasy or abject despair respectively. In both cases, I would argue that the text makes clear that this says more about the gaze of the colonizer than the person on whom they are gazing.

Stott reads these encounters as emblematic of not only the novel's treatment of Aïssa but Conrad's representation of colonial contact in his Malay fiction as a whole:

> A colonial encounter in a forest glade: a white man perceives the apparition of a native woman. This scene is *one of many* such colonial and sexual encounters in Conrad's early novels, in which the white male colonial gaze peers into the gloomy foliage which constitutes an Otherness, and there in the confusion of foliage, his searching eyes make out the form of a native woman. (emphasis added, 127)

Here Stott describes Willems' and Aïssa's initial encounter in order to argue that Conrad repeatedly enacts this archetypal imagery to articulate the colonial matrix in his early works. However, what Stott does not acknowledge in her generalisation is the performative aspect of these encounters, as Aïssa's image is reconstituted under the colonial gazes of her counterparts. She does appear as both exotic apparition and monstrous darkness in the text, and these are passages which clearly rely upon the entrenched strategies of eroticization and debasement in colonial rhetoric, yet at both moments Aïssa is also constructed before the

readers' eyes in ways that contradict the way she is perceived by these men.

The reader is privileged with knowledge that Willems does not have when he meets Aïssa in the forest glade; we, for example, can answer the questions of her identity and origin, knowing that far from emerging from the 'serried trees', she has a history of sea travel and piracy. In the chapter preceding Willems' first encounter with Aïssa, the reader is introduced to her when the narrative abruptly shifts from the initial frame of Willems' problems in Macassar, to the Malay characters, Babalatchi and Lakamba. What is significant about this exchange is the details the reader learns of Aïssa's origins: '"Her mother was a woman from the west; a Baghdadi woman with a veiled face"' (OI, 47); her father, 'the fearless Omar el Badavi, the leader of Brunei rovers,' (OI, 50). When he 'received [his] first serious check at the hands of white men' (OI, 51), and was blinded and his sons slaughtered, Aïssa nursed him back to health. She arrived in Sambir with Babalatchi and her father 'in a small prau loaded with green cocoanuts [sic],' sought shelter with the Rajah of Sambir, Lakamba, and '"Now she goes uncovered, like our [Malay] women do, for she is poor and he [Omar] is blind, and nobody ever comes near them"' (OI, 47). She's not even from Sambir, let alone the human form of its trees.

When Stott states 'Aïssa herself remains largely a blank in the text' (146), it undermines her reading of Aïssa as an archetypal embodiment of the colonial landscape because the text clearly provides a narrative that answers Willems' questions ('Who was she? Where did she come from?' (OI, 64)) and counters his reductive assessment of her. Furthermore, Stott's statement suggests that the imperial canon is not being read for the voices that are putatively effaced in 'official European histories' (Hellwig, 176), because if a reader looks for their own answers to Willems' questions rather than adhering to his answers, there are numerous examples of Aïssa's powerful articulation.

Her apocalyptic presence under Lingard's gaze, meanwhile, is similarly disrupted for the reader when her apparent vapour-like consistency abruptly solidifies into a disobedient body that refuses to be silent:

> 'when men meet in daylight women must be silent and abide their fate.'
>
> 'Women!' she retorted, with subdued vehemence. 'Yes, I am a woman! Your eyes see that, O Rajah Laut, but can you see my life? I also have heard – O man of many fights – I also have heard the voice of fire-arms; I also have felt the rain of young twigs and of leaves cut up by bullets fall down about my head; I also know how to look in silence at angry faces and at strong hands raised high grasping sharp steel.' (OI, 201)

Aïssa invokes her effaced origins – the very heritage Willems' gaze expunges when he decides the Sambir forest holds the key to her past – to assert her personhood, to stand before the King of the Sea (Rajah Laut) and be counted as someone with her own history of adventure, trauma and mobility. She even mocks his penetrating gaze, the apparently 'commanding view' of the colonizer (Spurr, 16), the omniscient eye of the white man. The

strength, power and vibrancy of Aïssa's voice is a subject to which I will return, but this example typifies the perpetual challenge this text poses to the straightforward reading Stott offers, whereby 'a white man perceives the apparition of a native woman' in a forest glade. Willems' and Lingard's appropriating perceptions of Aïssa are performed and parodied by a text that equally provides space for her voice, the articulation of her heritage and the demonstration of the stupidity of colonial assumptions such as those exemplified by these white men.

'Mutual Colonisation'

In order to sustain their interracial relationship, amidst the competing cultural discourses that constitute their divergent subject positions, both Willems and Aïssa attempt to block out the contradictions between them and create a muted bubble in which they can live together. Homi Bhabha's description of cultural difference explains why there is so much at stake for Willems and Aïssa here: 'cultural difference is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as "knowledge*able*", authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification' (emphasis original, 50). For Bhabha, cultural difference is an understanding of culture as constitutive of subject identity, as something mobile, fluid, and substantial enough that it becomes something by which to identify oneself. Crucially, cultural difference destabilises cultural authority, drawing attention to the ambivalence of cultural hierarchies, in which one culture attempts to assert its dominance and superiority over another (Bhabha, 51). The ambivalence of cultural difference, of which Bhabha writes, manifests in the way signs of Aïssa's difference trouble the solidity of Willems' own cultural identity.

After objectifying her to such an extent that it becomes impossible for him to imagine her even having access to a *cultural* identity, Willems continues to disavow her cultural enunciation, even when he does learn of her heritage. For instance, he is completely undone by signs of her Muslim identification:

> The upper part of her body was wrapped up in the thick folds of a head covering [. . .] Only her eyes were visible – sombre and gleaming like a starry night. Willems, looking at this strange, muffled figure, felt exasperated, amazed and helpless. [. . .] She looked like an animated package of cheap cotton goods! It made him furious. She had disguised herself so because a man of her race was near! He told her not to do it, and she did not obey. [. . .] This manifestation of her sense of proprieties was another sign of their hopeless diversity; something like another step downwards for him. She was too different from him. He was so civilized! It struck him suddenly that they had nothing in common – not a thought, not a feeling; he could not make clear to her the simplest motive of any act of his . . . and he could not live without her. [. . .] This little matter of her veiling herself against his wish acted upon him like a disclosure of some great disaster. It increased his contempt for himself as the slave of a passion he had always derided, as the man unable to assert his will. This will, all his sensations, his personality – all this seemed to be lost in the abominable desire, in the priceless promise of that woman. (OI, 110-111)

Willems reads Aïssa's head-covering as a battleground of cultural authority that dismantles

his own sense of his cultural identity; he is left ‘exasperated, amazed and helpless,’ and ‘furious.’ Significantly, he experiences his enduring desire for Aïssa in the context of her cultural difference – when her alterity cannot be effaced or forgotten, when her Otherness is so volubly stated – as the disintegration of his own Self: ‘his will [. . .], all his sensations, his personality – all this seemed to be lost in the abominable desire, in the priceless promise of that woman’. His desire for Aïssa in the face of such incontrovertible ‘hopeless diversity,’ erodes his integrated, contained personhood. He falls back on a crazed lexicon of his perceived racial superiority to articulate his discombobulation: ‘strange, muffled figure’; ‘animated package of cheap cotton goods.’

Fundamentally, Willems sees Aïssa’s veiling as an act of enunciation of her cultural difference – ‘disclosure’, a ‘manifestation of her sense of proprieties’ – as Bhabha describes enunciation:

> The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation [. . .] quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation [. . .] (54)

Here Aïssa’s ‘disclosure’ of her ‘sense of proprieties’, the constitutive forces of identity and value that she prioritises in her articulation of herself and how she appears in the world, inexorably challenge Willems’ own sense of cultural identity. His desire for Aïssa, in the presence of her pronounced difference, undermines his claim to Western cultural hegemony. He cannot understand how he can be ‘so civilised’ and yet such a ‘slave to passion’ for someone who enunciates a cultural meaning so opposed to his own values. Aïssa’s enunciation of difference is a sign of the lack of authentic, unitary authority of the Western cultural paradigms to which Willems subscribes; his own cultural purity frays before her cultural integrity.

As a result, Willems becomes invested in violently quashing any sign of difference between them:

> He urged her passionately to fly with him because out of all that abhorred crowd he wanted this one woman, but wanted her away from them, away from that race of slaves and cut-throats from which she sprang. He wanted her for himself – far from everybody, in some safe and dumb solitude. (OI, 129)

For Willems, the only way he can reconcile his desire for someone he sees as inferior is to eradicate those racial and cultural markers by which he determines her as such. Her enunciation of cultural difference must be muted; she must be secured in ‘dumb’ isolation. The visceral racial violence that inflects Willems’ thoughts in this passage reflect the extent to which the text dramatizes, through Willems, the colonizer role as one driven and defined by unjust and irrational hatred. His vitriol is so emphatic and disproportionate to the events and conversations around him, especially when countered with the perspectives of those he denigrates, that it reads as ludicrous racial panic.

Alexia Hannis describes the relationship between Aïssa and Willems as one of 'mutual colonisation,' which she elaborates as 'rapacious greed, a desire to totalize the other' (105). This is because Aïssa also attempts to disrupt Willems' identification with his European heritage, and cut him off from the society that may prohibit their desire for one another:

> 'Tell me, you will not return to your people; not without me. Not with me. Do you promise?'
>
> 'I have promised already. I have no people of my own. Have I not told you, that you are everybody to me?'
>
> 'Ah, yes,' she said, slowly, 'but I like to hear you say that again – every day, and every night, whenever I ask; and never to be angry because I ask. I am afraid of white women who are shameless and have fierce eyes.' She scanned his features close for a moment and added: 'Are they very beautiful? They must be.' (OI, 122)

Aïssa is unbearably jealous of the white women she believes govern Willems' white life because they represent both a society and a version of him to which she has no claim. She imagines that they have access to him and his life in a way that she does not; he must perpetually reiterate his devotion to her in order to counter the open gaze of omnipresent white women who she believes pose as her competition, despite the total absence of white women from the text. What is most significant here is that Aïssa articulates a version of white women that is at odds with prevailing discourses of gender and Empire in fin de siècle imperial cultural production. To Aïssa, white women manifest as obstructive sexual threats that intervene between herself and her white male lover, distracting him from their relationship and symbolising a challenge to their right to be together. This is an inverted dynamic by comparison with the ones Stoler and Roland Sintos Coloma have proposed.

Stoler argues that, as the designated sexual partners of white men in colonial posts, white women in imperial spaces bore the markers of appropriate sexual and racial behaviour. After the increase in white women travelling to and settling in European colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Stoler contends 'Male colonizers positioned European women as the bearers of a redefined colonial morality' (1989, 639-640). Where marriage between white men and women replaced sanctioned miscegenation (concubinage) as the normative model of colonial sexuality, Stoler contends, white women came to represent 'white prestige' and were cast as the saviours of the race (1989, 639).

Coloma also emphasises this signification of white women in his analysis of US imperialism in the Philippines in the early twentieth century. For this context, he remodels Spivak's 'white men saving brown women from white men' into 'white women saving brown women and white men from each other' (243). Significantly, the position of the 'brown woman' in either formulation remains the same; the subaltern continues to be the participant in the exchange whose lone perspective we never reach and whose voice we never hear. Coloma argues white women became '*bearers* of racialised heteronormative traditions and feminine respectability and [. . .] *barriers* to interracial sexual relations' (emphasis original, 245). It is the repressive effect of this barrier status that is at stake in Aïssa's articulation, as she voices the

unheard view of the perpetually subordinated woman of colour. The view expressed is even more subversive than the voice itself, as her characterisation of white women casts them not as respectable superiors, saviours of the race, but as more shameful, indiscreet and sexually aware than herself, the putative symbol of fecund tropical life. This is what makes Aïssa's formulation of white women so significant; the text provides breathing spaces for the silenced subaltern to articulate her desire, her fears of effacement and her own cultural anxieties about being in an interracial relationship.

Though Aïssa equally engages in a project of isolation, needing to be everything to Willems, she is severely punished for this enterprise. For Aïssa, Willems' betrayal of Lingard's navigational secrets signifies his severing of ties with European society and culture, and the cultural codes that interfere with their relationship. Once Willems and Abdulla have taken over Sambir, however, Willems raises a Dutch flag and pledges his allegiance to the Dutch Empire, greatly distressing Aïssa: 'It was that woman [Aïssa], who went for Willems. Ali says she was like a wild beast, but he [Willems] twisted her wrist and made her grovel in the dust' (OI, 151). When Aïssa expresses a similar unease to Willems at the cultural differences between them Willems punishes her violently, signifying his exclusive right to racial anxieties and totalizing possession. While he may disavow her culture in order to have 'her for himself – far from everybody' (OI, 129), he prohibits her efforts to claim him in the same cultural seclusion.

This part of the narrative is told to the reader through a protracted dialogue between Almayer and Lingard, as the former tells the latter of events in Sambir – namely Willems' betrayal – since Lingard last visited. Almayer narrates Willems' violent punishment of Aïssa, to Lingard, having heard of the event from his servant Ali. It is a publicly shared event (between Ali, Almayer, Lingard and the reader) at a narrative level but also in the space of the novel itself: '"Everybody in Sambir was there: women, slaves, children – everybody!"' (OI, 150). Willems demeans Aïssa in an exaggerated, public performance of his power over not only Aïssa, but the assembled Malay crowd as well. Willems' dominance over Aïssa is relayed through the 'faithful Sumatrese' (AF, 26) eyes of Ali, eyes that are positioned as equally inferior to the spectacle they are observing by Willems, and eyes that are only elevated from their supposed position of inferiority by their ability to relay the story to their European superiors. Hannis' term 'mutual colonisation' does not quite represent the power balance between Aïssa and Willems, as Willems ensures that the muting of enunciations of cultural difference and claims to exclusive identification only work one way.

For a time, it looks as though he succeeds in circumscribing Aïssa's cultural identification. Here, Almayer tells Lingard about her involvement in Willems' raid on Lingard and Co's compound, in which Almayer was sewn into a hammock and restrained:

> I lay there in the chair like a log, and that woman capered before me and made faces; snapped her fingers before my nose. [. . .] Now and then she would leave me alone to hang round his neck for awhile, and then she would return before my chair and begin her exercises again. He looked on, indulgent. [. . .] She drags him before my chair.

> 'I am like white women,' she says, her arms round his neck. (OI, 154)

To be with Willems, Aïssa conducts the performance of what she perceives is the prescribed role of white women; in order to qualify as his partner she must do his bidding, torment his enemies and identify as white.

However, the version of white woman to which her performance most closely adheres is her own. She is sexually aware, awakened and indiscreet, hanging round her lover's neck, embracing him before judgemental European eyes. Thus, her resistant cultural difference, the discourses that have inflected her own understanding of sexual propriety, accentuates this performance of white femininity. Her apparent adherence to the role of white woman also allows her the freedom to express her ownership of Willems, to once again lay claim to him as hers alone. Her performance thereby functions as parody of both Willems' attempts to suppress her alterity and broader Western gender discourses that position white women as saviours of the race.

In this way, Aïssa's parodic identification invokes Bhabha's mimicry: 'The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority' (emphasis original, 126). In identifying in the way Willems wants her to, in apparently disavowing her own cultural identification in favour of his, Aïssa creates an image of white femininity that undermines the cultural codes Willems has placed above her own. The image of the white woman, free and unveiled, that Willems valorises, moves through the same body that is apparently the image of 'that land of mysterious forests' (OI, 64). Willems' claim to Aïssa's cultural identification is undermined by the 'almost but not quite/white' (Bhabha, 131) of her performance as his partner. Aïssa *behaves herself* under Willems' rule and in doing so – in 'behaving herself' as an act of compliance with discipline, but also 'behaving as herself', as an enactment of her own selfhood – she undoes his authority to control her racial and cultural identification:

> *Almost the same but not white*: the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered *inter dicta*: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them. (emphasis original, Bhabha, 128)

Aïssa's performance of white femininity, the only manifestation of white women in the text, is 'uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them'. Her compliance is simultaneously her resistance, so that as Willems implements his cultural rules he provides the space, lexicon and borders in which they will be dismantled.

Aïssa's Voice

Covertly subversive 'between the lines' and 'within the rules' of the imperial codes that shape her life, Aïssa also represents anti-colonial, feminist resistance in more overt ways throughout the novel. There are many examples of textual pockets in which Aïssa's articulate, decisive

voice counters those of the white men who Other her. Firstly, parrying Willems' exoticisation of her as 'the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests', Aïssa asks her own questions of her lover's origins, and has her own answers: '"Where do you come from?" she said, impulsive and inconsequent, in a passionate whisper. "What is that land beyond the great sea from which you come? A land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us – who are not white"' (OI, 123). This exchange is in the context of Aïssa's insistence on Willems' disavowal of white society, where she stresses her jealousy of white women as mentioned above. Her explicit challenge to the colonial narratives of European supremacy, benevolence and progress mark her as one of the 'prominent female figures whose position offered an important critique of imperialism' (2001, 1), that Susan Jones identifies in Conrad's early work. Jones argues such vocal anti-imperialist rhetoric recasts Willems in the exotic Other role, as the text emphasises his alien alterity in Aïssa's eyes, 'complicating the notion of a fixed imperial subject embodied in the white European male' (2001, 10). By articulating the 'colonized's' experience of European imperialism, Aïssa reconfigures the power dynamics between them so that Willems becomes the objectified foreign embodiment of cultural assumptions. Significantly, the text provides equal space for Aïssa's voice, as she speaks for 'us – who are not white,' as it does for Willems' colonial projection of Aïssa onto the forest. In fact, Aïssa's anti-imperialist critique is privileged over Willems' colonial prejudices, because when he looks to the trees of the forest for answers about the woman in front of him, he is already undermined in the eyes of any reader who remembers her history from the previous chapter.

The narrative persistently balances Willems' hateful racist rhetoric with breathing spaces in which the reader can empathise and identify with Aïssa. Willems' wish to remove her from 'that race of slaves and cut-throats from which she sprang,' in which he is 'carried away by the flood of hate, disgust, and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race' (OI, 129), is positioned alongside Aïssa's thoughtful reflections:

> she saw with rage and pain the edifice of her love, her own work, crumble slowly to pieces, destroyed by that man's fears, by that man's falseness. Her memory recalled the days by the brook when she had listened to other words – to other thoughts – to promises and to pleadings for other things, which came from that man's lips at the bidding of her look or her smile, at the nod of her head, at the whisper of her lips. (OI, 129)

Willems' racial hatred is not privileged over Aïssa's dismay, disappointment and distress at his contempt. Moreover, this textual juxtaposition powerfully reminds us that Willems is not enslaved by Aïssa, as Sewlall argues. Willems figures his desire as 'louder than his hate, stronger than his fear, deeper than his contempt – irresistible and certain like death itself' (OI, 129), but Aïssa's memories of 'the days by the brook,' of his 'promises and pleadings,' suggest that, far from being the victim of the 'tropical' femme fatale, he actively cultivated this relationship on his own terms. His embittered colonial register is rendered a symptom of his 'falseness' through this direct comparison, while this window into Aïssa's version of their days

of courtship means that in answer to Willems' hatred, the text presents Aïssa's love.

This presentation of Aïssa as an eloquent desiring subject develops into her defiance against colonial agents that threaten their relationship. When Lingard tells her '"Go to your own people. Leave him"' (OI, 208), she responds

> Tell the brook not to run to the river; tell the river not to run to the sea. Speak loud. Speak angrily. Maybe they will obey you. But it is in my mind that the brook will not care. The brook that springs out of the hillside and runs to the great river. He would not care for your words: he that cares not for the very mountain that gave him life; he that tears the earth from which he springs. Tears it, eats it, destroys it – to hurry faster to the river – to the river in which he is lost for ever. . . . O Rajah Laut! I do not care. (OI, 208)

In some ways, this moment of articulation exemplifies the colonial rhetoric attached to Aïssa's depiction in the text; in emphasising the naturalness of her desire for Willems, she again aligns herself with the colonial landscape. She expresses herself through the imagery of nature, appealing to the land to substantiate the authenticity of her desire, rather than her own cultural identity. It appears she has no frame of reference for her rapacious longing, other than the unstoppable force of the brook, tearing, eating and destroying the mountainside to get where it needs to be. However, it is also possible that this reference point more accurately reflects the reductive primitivism of desire, or, in other words, what desire does to one's ability to speak it.

Catherine Belsey writes of 'the sea, music, riding among the stars' as 'the common repertoire of nineteenth- and twentieth-century metaphors for desire':

> Desire, we are to understand, is boundless, natural, profound, transfiguring. And like each of [these metaphors], it is wordless. [. . .] in order to speak, to ground itself at the level of the signifier, love can only quote [. . .] It thus draws attention to its elusiveness, its excess over the signifier. Desire is what is *not* said [. . .] Desire is thus *understood* by the reader, recognized as the meaning of a textual gesture which is almost emblematic. (emphasis original, 17-18)

Belsey's description of the effect of these metaphors, especially the wordlessness of desire, evokes Aïssa's brook. Belsey's construction of desire as something never quite articulated, expressed only at a distance in the very essence of what is not said, reverberates through Aïssa's testimony of her love for Willems. Her metaphor connotes the all-consuming compulsion of desire; the brook's inevitable course to the river will lead it to be engulfed, swallowed whole and no longer a distinct entity. Belsey traces this lexicon in popular romance fiction of the twentieth century:

> Passion in romance is commonly a storm, a flood, a tidal wave, or sometimes flames, a hurricane, a volcano or an earthquake. In all these cases it is elemental, beyond control, majestic, thrilling, dangerous. The helpless protagonist experiences desire as burning, falling through space, submerging or drowning. [. . .] Curiously, the metaphors of desire repeatedly invoke not pleasure, but various kinds of natural disturbance or disaster. [. . .] Disasters mark the limits of human mastery. (27)

The vocabulary of desire repeatedly relies on the very edges of human experience for its frames of reference. This resonates with the way desire is thought about and articulated in the novel.

As I contended earlier, Willems imagines their relationship as the disintegration of his superior racial integrity, as he becomes 'lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly' (OI, 72). It is his dissolving identity, the breakdown of the putatively ordered white-male self, that has received the most critical attention. But Aïssa expresses her own experience of being overwhelmed by desire for an Other, much more compassionately and lyrically than Willems. Where his existential crisis takes on the vocabulary of racial panic ('surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life' (OI, 72)), hers galvanises her into a bold confrontation of European power in defence of herself and her relationship. The eloquence and composure with which Aïssa speaks her desire complicates Willems' singular claim to coherent subject status; as Belsey notes 'To be in love is to be the protagonist of a story' (ix). The text balances his position as protagonist, the narrative space given to his introspection – his worries, his concerns, his experience of desire – with hers.

The defiance that erupts in Aïssa's articulation of desire echoes the intuitively subversive account of desire Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose: 'Desire does not "want" revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as though involuntarily, by wanting what it wants' (116); '"Tell the brook not to run to the river [. . .] the brook will not care."' (OI, 208). Aïssa's desire is not in itself an act of deliberate insubordination, but rather, like the brook running to the river, it encounters barriers along the way that must be overcome (that are already not barriers because their being overcome is inevitable), and in this way her desire is revolutionary for 'wanting what it wants.' Deleuze and Guattari propose desire as 'explosive' because 'no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, hierarchy being compromised' (116). Aïssa's desire explodes Lingard's socio-political codes of racial purity, because it transcends the hierarchies that subordinate her into the immobilised subaltern position without agency, power or voice. Lingard can 'Speak loud. Speak angrily' against Aïssa's desire, to impose the regulations that stratify colonial culture, but her brook will keep running all the same. Aïssa's articulation of desire, though indeed redolent of the natural imagery that Willems uses to inscribe her when they first meet, speaks clearly to her position as a desiring subject. This presentation destabilises the power structures that signify her sexual desire as illegitimate.

These breathing spaces, in which Aïssa's voice pierces the colonial register of the novel, recur throughout as she manifests as an agent with thoughts and feelings that cannot be reduced, interpreted or translated. After her confrontation with Lingard, Aïssa begins to understand that the worst punishment for Willems is to be left alone with her. The poignancy of her quiet sadness at this realisation is conveyed, not through her voice, but her silence: 'the words that were on her lips fell back unspoken into her benighted heart; fell back amongst the

mud, the stones – and the flowers, that are at the bottom of every heart' (OI, 210). Although this is another example of Aïssa's feelings being expressed through an association between herself and nature, it gestures towards another eloquent expression of unspeakable longing. It registers Aïssa's singular experience of desire in the prescribed grammar of universal experiences of desire: 'What matter [. . .] who is speaking, when desire is always derivative, conventional, *already* written' (emphasis original, Belsey, 7). The text's introspection into Aïssa's thoughts recovers her from her Othered role as exotic/erotic object-body, as she stands as the protagonist at the centre of a story of imperial sexuality, which is revolutionary in its own way.

'Crime of Passion'

The prevalence of Aïssa's expression of desire demonstrates the text's ambivalent depiction of interracial sexuality, an ambivalence easily overlooked in the generic turns of the plot. Siti Ahmad argues that Conrad perpetuates the colonial rhetoric of miscegenation as cultural degeneration, condemning interracial relationships:

> Conrad draws out an important lesson from Willems and Aïssa's doomed relationship: that the two worlds, the East and the West, cannot coexist in the same sphere. To be specific, the relationship is impossible because the female Other is a negative force whose influence is literally deadly to the white male colonizer [. . .] (65)

Ahmad makes this claim because of the novel's ending, in which Aïssa kills Willems in what Jones describes as a 'crime of passion' (2001, 11), but, for me, both critics misrepresent this act.

Aïssa finally shoots Willems when confronted with his 'lawful love' (OI, 278), as his mixed-race wife Joanna appears in Sambir to reclaim her husband. Willems describes her as his wife '"according to our white law, which comes from God!"' (OI, 285), invoking the prohibitive imperial codes on miscegenation, and aligning himself, after all, with European culture. In rejecting Aïssa by reverting to the 'white laws' of sexuality, he makes her bear the weight and shame of their relationship.

When read in the context of Willems' consistent abuse, disregard for their relationship, and dismissal of Aïssa's cultural identity, the shooting reads as an anti-colonial act of political protest, rather than a 'crime of passion'. Willems plans to take his gun with him for protection from the reputedly violent indigenous population he expects to meet as he travels up the river to follow Joanna. Aïssa has other ideas:

> Willems made for the revolver. Aïssa passed swiftly, giving him an unexpected push that sent him staggering away from the tree. She caught up the weapon, put it behind her back, and cried–
>
> 'You shall not have it. Go after her. Go to meet danger . . . Go to meet death . . . Go unarmed . . . Go with empty hands and sweet words . . . as you came to me . . . Go helpless and lie to the forests, to the sea . . . to the death that waits for you . . .'
>
> [. . .] He dared not go unarmed. He made a long stride, and saw her raise the revolver. He noticed that she had not cocked it, and

> said to himself that, even if she did fire, she would surely miss. Go too high; it was a stiff trigger. He made a step nearer – saw the long barrel moving unsteadily at the end of her extended arm. He thought: This is my time . . . He bent his knees slightly, throwing his body forward, and took off with a long bound for a tearing rush. He saw a burst of red flame before his eyes, and was deafened by a report that seemed to him louder than a clap of thunder. Something stopped him short, and he stood aspiring in his nostrils the acrid smell of the blue smoke that drifted from before his eyes like an immense cloud . . . Missed, by Heaven! . . . Thought so! (OI, 288-289)

But Aïssa did not miss; Willems is finally undone by his arrogant denial of her power. He perpetually disavows her heritage, looking to the forest for answers to her origins, but it is ultimately her own adventuring past that equips her with the skills to manage the 'stiff trigger' that Willems assumes is his protection. He trusts his life to her inferiority and this is his downfall.

While Ahmad's reading records these events as if Willems is a sympathetic character, Jones' 'crime of passion' description undersells the potency of Aïssa's agency and power in this moment. On one level the text does tell the story of a European man who is ruined by his desire for a woman of colour, but it also reflects the perspective of that female character as a subject, exploited and mistreated by a nasty, brutish thug. Ultimately, she does destroy him, but not through the enveloping gothic creepers of the 'tropical life' with which he associates her, but with his own mechanical revolver. The phallic symbol of modernity and imperial violence is turned upon its owner, by the person reductively thought unable to access such modernity because of her innate primitivism. Aïssa's 'crime' thus functions as another enunciation of her cultural identity in the face of further shaming, dehumanising colonial rhetoric.

An Outcast of the Islands positions a woman of colour, with desires, agency and voice, at the centre of a register of colonial intrigue between unlikeable white men. The colonial lexicon that positions her as unequal to Willems, intervenes in her experience of sexuality, and figures her relationship as a degenerating plague on the integrity of the white male are overturned, or at least doubled, through her subversive mimicking of white women, her anti-imperialist critique, and her eloquent, transcendental articulation of her desire. Aïssa's cultural difference cannot be effaced within or outside of the text's imperialist narratives. Within this catalogue of colonial cliché, in which 'a white man perceives the apparition of a native woman' in a forest glade (Stott, 127), Aïssa enunciates her own identity, and it is one fundamentally at odds with the imperialist project. Finding Aïssa, hearing her, attests to the breathing spaces in the colonial canon that we can choose to prioritise; Aïssa is my protagonist.

Chapter 4: 'We Are the Creatures of Our Light Literature': Trash Conrad, Pulp Paperback Covers and Aïssa in Colour

In Chapter 3, I argued that we could employ a strategy of reading *An Outcast of the Islands* that prioritised the moments in which we hear Aïssa's voice, feel her desires and follow her actions, to reposition her as the real protagonist of the novel. In this chapter, I examine the way she mattered and materialised on the covers of American mass market paperback editions of the novel from 1959 to 1966. I ask what happens to the cultural distinctions of high and low art when the work of Joseph Conrad, a cornerstone of the fin de siècle and proto-modernist literary canons, *becomes* popular culture. What happens to the make-up of a story, how is its value or meaning affected, how do the images or voices of characters change in the mind of the reader, when it is marketed in a certain way? What happens to the narrative space provided by the text for the non-white woman's voice, thoughts, desire and subjectivity when the text materialises in a book that hides her cultural identity from the cover?

Pulp

The American mass market paperback revolution that took place between the 1930s and the early 1960s, widely referred to as the golden age of pulps, led to a culture in which literary texts, as well as not-so literary texts, were devoured and discarded. According to the famous writer of the seminal lesbian pulp *Beebo Brinker* series, Ann Bannon, books were so cheap, '"You could read them on the bus and leave them on the seat"' (qtd. in Forrest, x). As Susan Stryker argues, paperback pulps 'were produced for a culture accustomed to ease and hooked on speed – packaged and marketed with the same ad agency acumen that invented streamlined toasters and tail-finned automobiles' (8). For Stryker, they spoke to and catered for a society driven by consumption: 'Born from a seamless fusion of form and function, paperbacks became near-perfect commodities – little machines built to incite desire at the point of purchase, capture it, and drive it repeatedly into the cash nexus at 25 cents a pop' (8). The pulp paperback was characterised by its cheapness, Stryker argues, designed to be devoured as a one-off hit of arousal.

Erin Smith also emphasises the consumable nature of pulp paperbacks, describing them as 'convenient – small, portable, disposable – [. . .] readers could carry one in a pocket or handbag to read in brief snatches over lunch, during a break, or while commuting' (153). Paula Rabinowitz similarly highlights their appeal as mobile, ephemeral commodities: 'These cheap twenty-five-cent books found in bus and train stations, soda fountains and candy stores, drugstores and newspaper kiosks called out to a mobile population of workingmen and women commuting on trolleys and subways to work in midsize cities, or crisscrossing the country as traveling salesmen or leisured vacationers' (36-37). Rabinowitz and Smith both define the pulp paperback as a travelling emblem of a moving pleasure industry, because of their size and

price. They represented fiction that was read in public, while appealing to very private needs, as Rabinowitz contends: ‘Small enough to be tucked into a breast pocket or handbag and read at a lunch counter or on the streetcar, the more risqué and daring books could be hidden and read late into the night. They are portable tokens of the public and mass experience of the movie theatre but meant to be savoured alone’ (37). Paperbacks were imbued with salacious thrill, suggestive of provocation and excitement, but they were also a staple of public spaces, such as the streetcar or lunch counter, as both Rabinowitz and Smith contend.

Rabinowitz goes on to explain the significance of their public life, arguing ‘If books could move out of bookstores and libraries into drugstores, they could be viewed as at once ubiquitous items necessary for daily life – like newspapers, toothpaste, candy bars, or cigarettes [. . .] – and thus part of the vast array of consumer products flowing across America, and as private tokens acquired in the very shops where personal items and medical prescriptions necessary for particular purchasers could be found’ (53-54). Their position on the racks of the drugstore meant that pulp paperbacks were simultaneously part of the mass market of capitalist consumption crucial to post-war American society, while also being tied to the intimate, bodily needs of consumers, as pervasive sites of personal pleasure. Rabinowitz highlights the distinction between the contexts in which these books were sold (the bookstore or the drugstore), and how this alone could mark the way they were consumed.

As Smith argues, the existence of the pulps and the way they were sold disrupted definitions of cultural value in other ways too: ‘Trashy paperback originals mingled promiscuously with cheap reprints of literary classics by New American Library and others. One could not tell from the cover alone whether cultural uplift or sensationalised corruption lay within and this uncertainty tended to blur any clear distinction between high and low’ (154). Not every book on the drugstore rack would have been written to arouse, though probably all would have been marketed in such a way as to suggest that this was what the text behind the bright, attractive cover (with its colourful, desirable bodies), promised its prospective readers. I will return to Smith’s point about the role of the cover later, but first, I want to explore her argument that the ‘promiscuous mingling’ of literary genius under pulp covers troubled the categories of high and low art.

This blurring between highbrow and lowbrow, represented by the pulp paperbacks, has been the subject of recent research, as Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey argue in *Modernism’s Print Culture*: ‘as important research by David Earle and Paula Rabinowitz demonstrates, the 1940s and 1950s saw many of the major works of modernist fiction republished in cheap paperback formats, often with racy cover designs. This, in effect, marked the entry of these texts into popular culture’ (18). Hammill and Hussey suggest that modernist print culture scholarship is moving towards studying modernist literature in popular, as well as the more traditional, esoteric contexts, such as the periodical publications discussed in

Chapter 2. As Hammill and Hussey suggest, the work of both Rabinowitz and Earle position scholarship of pulp magazines and paperbacks within the remit of modernist studies.

Indeed, Earle has argued that 'the paperback is a peculiarly modernist form' (2009, 157), as he contends 'modernism's claim to timeliness, to capturing the existing, contemporary, modern moment is itself an ephemeral act: not only dedicated to capturing a fleeting impression of time and place, but enmeshed in a depiction that is, by modernity's very pace and nature, doomed to be outmoded' (2009, 157-158). Far from being beyond the scope of modernist scholarship, Earle argues the paperback form encapsulates the impulse within the modernist movement to speak to the changing pressures of a precise cultural moment, while always 'making it new', creating something that would necessarily be replaced with each new artistic tide.

As well as eloquently describing the contexts and characteristics of pulp paperbacks, Rabinowitz writes of what happened to works of literary renown when they were published as pulp: 'The mechanisms of pulping a work entailed a process of redistribution or, more precisely, remediation: writings often created for an educated and elite audience took on new lives by being repackaged as cheap paperbacks' (30). Rabinowitz argues that in being published in paperback form, on low quality paper made from wood-pulp, works were transformed into pulp fiction. She describes this process as 'pulping', evoking a sort of melting, pounding, pulverizing procedure, in which high art is detached from its sticky canonical associations, and shaped into a product that the imagined 'masses' can digest. It is this metaphor of transformation with which I am so concerned in this chapter. As Rabinowitz contends, 'the story of modernism's pulping is a reclamation project' (31), and reclaiming Conrad is a central component of this thesis.

Trash Conrad

Conrad's work has often been discussed in relation to popular culture, with the overwhelming consensus being that he was inspired by it, playing with popular conventions and employing familiar tropes, but in distinctly artful ways. Where Andrew Glazzard writes of his work 'as a *response* to popular genres' (emphasis added, 2), Susan Jones describes his work as 'sometimes conforming [to] and sometimes departing' from the themes of the popular novel (2001, 191). There is an implicit distinction here whereby Conrad's work, though obviously consumed as popular during his lifetime, is not permitted to fall into the category of 'popular genres' because Conrad *intended* to parody this culture rather than to be part of it.

This is most evident in Linda Dryden's writing on the contemporary reactions to *Almayer's Folly*. In writing that 'even some favourable reviews *mistook Almayer's Folly* for a romance' (emphasis added, 2000, 51), she implies that to read Conrad's writing as popular fiction is to be mistaken. She continues, 'what many reviewers *failed to understand*, however, is that *Almayer's Folly* is a novel that challenges assumptions of the romance rather than

perpetuating them; it is ultimately a realist tale whose preoccupation with subverting the imperial romance signals the first step in Conrad's progress towards literary modernism' (emphasis added, 2000, 51). According to Dryden, readers who do not see the text as subversive proto-modernism are 'fail[ing] to understand' it. However, I believe that if we decentre the intentions of the sticky 'Conradian' author-God and move beyond always thinking of Conrad's writing as *responding* to popular fiction, the contexts in which his work *became* popular fiction manifest clearly.

The reclamation project pulped modernism represents, that Rabinowitz describes, is an important part of Earle's research too, as he uses the 1950 Signet edition of *Heart of Darkness* to write of a '"Pulp Conrad" – sensational, material, and commercial' (2013, 43). Analysing the Signet edition's salacious cover (Figure 11), alongside reprints and serializations of Conrad's work in pulp magazines (such as *The Golden Book*), Earle argues that 'what emerges from a history of American populist printing is a new, anti-academic, street-level version of "Conrad": as a writer of the newsstand' (2013, 49). Crucially, this 'Pulp Conrad' runs counter to the traditional construction of 'Conrad' within the literary canon. As Earle writes, 'Conrad's popular reception is of history, while his academic reception supports today's Conrad industry. There is a constructed opposition between these two extremes of highbrow and lowbrow, despite ongoing attempts to destabilize these categories' (2013, 49). The version of Conrad that was published in *The Golden Book*, for example, and the version of *Heart of Darkness* that was packaged beneath a racy cover, is at odds with the version of Conrad that we are most accustomed to seeing, in the university library, on English Literature syllabuses, in the 'classic literature' section of the bookshop, positioned within the sanctioned anthologies of the Norton Critical Series, or the inordinately expensive Cambridge Editions. In 'today's Conrad industry', 'Conradian' signifies the highbrow, worthy, *literary*, existential, philosophical output of an extraordinary white male genius (whose 'genius' resides in his writing about white men), but tracing his pulp publication history recodes this version of the Conrad canon. Earle argues that the 'gap between writerly intent and audience reception is best illustrated in the pulp paperback' (2009, 172), as the pulp genres of paperback and pulp magazines 'physically strip the text of academic preconceptions' (2009, 173). Thus, like the periodical context I described in Chapter 2, the pulp paperback form can detach the sticky associations attributed to work deemed 'Conradian.'

Unfortunately, however, the way Earle writes about *Lord Jim* suggests that 'Conradian' Conrad is always centre stage:

> Conrad uses the form of the adventure story in order to critique it as well as the ethos it informs. This type of literary colonization, or covert act, is dialectical, mediating and existing between the extremes. Toward whatever end, the form still has simultaneous aspects of elite *and* popular, and works (*consciously, I would argue*) as both. If *Conrad's intent* [. . .] is to criticize a popular form, such as adventure or romance, by adopting and parodying that same popular

> form/vernacular, what happens if the book is itself marketed to the same audience that it is criticizing? (emphases added, 2009, 179)

Earle argues that *Lord Jim* reflects the way Conrad played with popular fiction tropes, and questions how this playfulness then impacts on our understanding of the text, and the author, when they are 'pulped'. In asking what happens when the text is sold as the very type of work Conrad was intending to parody, Earle places Conrad's intent at the centre of his discussion of Conrad's 'pulping.' This focus on Conrad's intent reflects the way Earle here is perpetuating 'today's Conrad industry,' even when he is trying to work against it; Conrad's 'genius' casts a shadow even for critics urging us to think of him outside of his canonical contexts.

As well as demonstrating the extent to which the sticky associations attached to 'Conradian' Conrad are ingrained, Earle's invocation of Conrad's intent, in a book about the decentring potential of pulp contexts for the modernist canon, positions Conrad as the exception to his argument. Maybe, as Earle suggests, in being a writer who toyed with popular fiction in his lifetime, his writerly intent will always remain part of any discussion of his work in relation to popular fiction after his death. Indeed, the pulp covers I examine in this chapter do not appear to 'physically strip the text of academic preconceptions' (Earle, 2009, 173), as prospective readers are continually reminded of Conrad's canonical role.

An Outcast of the Islands is explicitly marked as 'classic,' published as elite by Pyramid Books (who curated it in their Pyramid Royal series), by Dell Publishing Company (who printed it as part of 'The Laurel' collection) and by Airmont Publishing Company (who included it in their Classics range). On the back cover of the 1960 Pyramid Royal edition of the text, Conrad is afforded considerable status on the blurb, as 'a master mariner before he turned to writing' who 'explores both the depths of degradation and the heights of courage' (Pyramid Royal, 1960, back cover). The Dell and Airmont editions of the text, meanwhile, both have the academic endorsement of introductions which also furnish quotations for the back cover.

The blurb for the Dell edition explicitly sells *An Outcast of the Islands* as part of the 'Conradian' canon: 'Here, as in *Almayer's Folly*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo* and other of his masterpieces, Joseph Conrad probes with compassionate skill the mastery of man's relation to his surroundings and his response to their challenge' (back cover, Dell, 1962). The back cover goes on to quote from Albert J. Guerard's introduction: 'These first-decade novels constitute "an extraordinary personal vision and creation, dark yet glowingly alive"' (Dell, 1962, back cover). This is from Guerard's final paragraph (his last words before Conrad's, as one reads the text), in which he reiterates the seriousness and intractability of Conrad's canonical status: 'the works of the first decade, from *Almayer's Folly* [1895] through *Nostromo* [1904], constitute an extraordinary personal vision and creation, dark yet glowingly alive**.** They are more than enough to assure Conrad his austere and very high place' (Dell, 1962, 21). 'Conrad' the author becomes a brand-name synonymous with genius and mastery, elevating the cultural value of this edition of the text, as readers are sold his work in relation to 'his austere and very high place.'

The blurb for the Airmont edition similarly lifts wholesale from the introduction by Nathan R. Teitel, in which he urges readers to commit to Conrad's challenging prose because the text is evidence of his individual artistry: 'This novel is a dark journey, but a rewarding one. In it, Conrad sharpened his tools and forged his craft' (Airmont, 1966, back cover). Readers will be rewarded, the blurb (and uncited Teitel) suggests, for persevering with the difficulties the text presents, because it reflects the writerly craft of the one and only 'Joseph Conrad'. Most significantly, the Airmont edition sells the novel as exemplary of his work, the first line of the blurb reading '*An Outcast of the Islands* is typical Conrad' (Airmont, 1966, back cover). The first thing a potential reader of the Airmont edition is told about this text is that it signifies the canonicity of its author.

Though the Pyramid Royal, Dell and Airmont versions of the text all signpost the canonical status of its author on their covers, they are already aimed at the reader of 'classic' literature. What is possibly more significant is that even the pulpiest of the pulp paperbacks I look at in this chapter, the 1959 Pyramid Books print of the novel, sells Conradian genius as part of the novel's appeal: 'Joseph Conrad has fashioned one of the most powerful and moving masterpieces of modern literature' (Pyramid Books, 1959, back cover). The text is elevated from the supposedly 'lowbrow' stories that predominate the paperback form, signalled as a 'masterpiece' 'fashioned' by Conrad, who is necessarily positioned as its 'master.' It is also described as 'Joseph Conrad's great novel of tragic grandeur in the tropics' (Pyramid Books, 1959, 1), on the very first page of the book, and overleaf there is an 'about the author' section that calls Conrad 'a master of tales of the sea,' who 'has no equal' (Pyramid Books, 1959, 2). Conrad's canonical status is thus a significant factor in how these texts were marketed, with prospective readers/consumers repeatedly urged to remember, regardless of any other motivations that pull them towards the book, or push them away from it, that he is a genius and the novel is a work of art.

It would seem, then, that where Conrad is concerned the pulp format might not detach the sticky associations of 'Conradian' Conrad. However, another way to look at this is that his canonical status, as genius, author, master, is itself being 'pulped' in these editions. Turn the book over and on the front cover of each of these paperbacks, the sexualized image of a woman's body appears in every case. With their valorisation of Conrad's prowess on the back cover, and their sensationalised depiction of Aïssa on the front, these paperbacks posit an exotic, erotic pin up as the flip side to canonical Conrad. Earle writes of 'a gap between the academic and the "common reader," [. . .] that is illustrated inversely by the gap between paperback marketing and textual content' (2009, 193), whereby the academic reads for textual content, while the 'common reader' is attracted by the paperback marketing. With these paperbacks, however, Conrad's name is sold as part of the paperbacks' appeal, conflating these putatively different readerships; just as the 'common reader' is reminded to take the text seriously, so the 'academic reader' is encouraged to read this 'masterpiece' through dirty

covers, and ‘typical Conrad’ becomes associated with the sexual fantasies these pulps are selling.

Drawing on the broader strokes of Earle’s research, where he explores Conrad as ‘a writer of the newsstand’ (2013, 49), I want to look at these pulp paperback prints of *An Outcast of the Islands* away from the long shadow of Conrad’s intent, and trace instead the version of the story and the version of Aïssa’s place within it that is being sold on their covers. Conrad’s intent does not need to be part of the equation: so what if he only meant to respond to popular fiction? To answer Earle’s question (what happens when a text parodying romance fiction is sold as romance fiction?), the text changes; it stops being a parody because it is no longer read as parody – Conrad’s feelings don’t come into it. (How’s Conrad? Still dead.) Earle’s Conrad blind spot suggests that even when Conrad’s works are read under pulp paperback covers, they are still inescapably read as works by *THE* Joseph Conrad, first and foremost. Rather than reading these paperbacks in terms of Conrad as pulp, then, I propose reading him as trash.

Clive Bloom evocatively calls pulp paperbacks ‘trash art’ (4), an ‘underclass of literary production’ (5). Indeed, as Rabinowitz states, the very pulpiness of these books, ‘made from the leftovers of paper production’, meant ‘pulp paperbacks were meant for the trash can, not the museum or library’ (38). In thinking about the specific publishing contexts of these mass market paperbacks, it is important not to forget their ephemerality as insubstantial objects designed to be consumed and discarded. The ones in my possession are literally falling apart. Like the pulp magazines and periodicals from which they sprang, they were never meant to be preserved, treasured or imbued with such cultural distinction. If thinking of a ‘pulp Conrad’ still does not help us to work around the spectre of Conrad’s canonical status – the perpetual invocation of his ultimate mastery and genius that is raised every time the question of his intent is asked – perhaps thinking in terms of a ‘trash Conrad,’ in which his work is published in a form that has depreciated in cultural value (at the same time as the words within have been accruing it), might.

As David Glover and Scott McCracken argue, embracing the ‘trashy-ness’ of the pulp paperback form can unlock its subversive potential:

> it was the most despised reaches of the mass market paperback market that provided a space within which [. . .] queer sexualities could be explored, their illicit appeal struggling against (and perhaps incited by) the orthodox medical and religious discourses that sought to pathologize them. The fear and fascination aroused by this kind of fantasmatic reading at the limit is a sign of the intensity with which such ‘trashy’ texts are consumed by readers who only meet in their imaginations. (8-9)

Glover and McCracken posit that it is within the pages of the trashiest of this ‘trash art’ (Bloom, 4) form, that the most forbidden, prohibited identities and desires could be explored. Here at the fringes of what is acceptable as fiction (politically, aesthetically and materially), we have another site of queer pleasure that puts ‘bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the

scripts of compulsory heterosexuality' (Ahmed, 2014, 165). Trash does not necessarily connote an object that lacks value, for me, but rather an object rejected by the discourses that mark certain things as aesthetically or culturally valid. When I write of 'trash' Conrad, I am not invoking a 'worthless' Conrad, but rather an 'unworthy' one, that I construct against the highbrow, respectable and literary 'Conrad' that has dominated Conrad scholarship for so long.

Paratext

The most obvious space of 'queer pleasures' within the pulp form is undoubtedly the suggestive and even sexually explicit front covers. As Stryker argues, pulp covers sold sex:

> Sporting lurid art and breathless blurbs that hawked whatever sensationalistic (or merely sensationalized) story lay between the covers, mid-twentieth-century paperbacks were designed to be seen. They were signs and symptoms of the newfound visibility that sexuality in all its myriad forms achieved in America during the tumultuous years around World War II. (5)

The bright covers designed to catch the eye, Stryker contends, offered visual and visible sexualities that were traditionally unspoken or unspeakable in orthodox mainstream culture. Rabinowitz similarly argues that the sexuality on display on these covers was part of the pulps' powerful appeal: 'Their lurid, colourful covers telegraphed stories of sex and violence that traversed class and racial boundaries' (37). The images these cheap paperbacks presented sold the stories within in terms of transgressive and compelling desires, aimed at a wide readership. They offered prospective readers the promise of indulgent fantasy, as Stryker explains: 'Featuring eye-grabbing illustrations of primal scenes blatantly displayed in the public sphere, the covers seduced readers with the imagined pleasures and forbidden knowledge within. They supplied a porous, emotionally charged, two-way boundary between the hidden and the seen' (8). Stryker's description of the cover in terms of a border space in which the text meets the reader (and the world) and the reader meets the text, evokes Gerard Genette's definitive work, *Paratexts*.

Genette argues that 'More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold* [. . .] a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back' (emphasis original, 1997a, 1-2). Genette posits that that which surrounds the text, within which those golden words are packaged for our consumption, works as a malleable, mobile entry point through which meaning travels. Furthermore, for Genette, this entrance or border space acts as signifier for the text itself. It marks its physical presence in the world, denoting the space it takes up:

> although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present,* to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. (emphasis original, 1997a, 1)

Genette suggests that if the text is presented to us by its paratext, if it is made present through its material form, if it exists within packaging that provides the space for it to take up, then we can say that the paratext makes the text, and even that the paratext *is* the text. Or as Sarah Brouillette puts it in *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, 'the material aspects of a text, including its format, cover, packaging and typography [. . .] are *textual* in their own right' (emphasis original, 2).

Earle neatly summarises the textuality of a book's matter, and how the material forms a text takes on affect the way that text works:

> the marketing provenance of a book, its very materiality, constitutes *a literature of its own*, a constructed aura or psychology of the physical book that is symbiotic to the fiction as well as our understanding of it. In the marketplace, the basic look of a book at the moments of decision to buy or not transforms all buyers into primal literary critics. The book, whether ephemeral or fine edition, is indeed the most primary or rudimentary form of advertising (and in many instances holds both overt and complex clues to the text and its production). (emphasis added, 2009, 158)

The way a book looks, its shape, weight, colour, size, texture, becomes 'a literature of its own', adjacent to, and even in place of, the text within. Earle argues this is particularly so with covers: 'Given this, the dust covers of a Scribners first edition or a later Bantam paperback are each texts in themselves that tell very different stories' (2009, 158). A book cover can be read as a signpost and advert for the story behind it, Earle suggests, selling and telling a particular version of the text and its characters.

Alison M. Scott argues that the book cover is especially textual in the case of pulps, writing 'you *can* tell these books by their covers. That is to say, pulp magazines and paperback books are substantive cultural artefacts that carry, on the slick, coated paper of their covers and the rough, cheap newsprint of their pages, abundant information about the circumstances of their creation and meaning' (emphasis original, 41). Scott suggests that researching pulps means reading their covers as '*textual* in their own right' (emphasis original, Brouillette, 2), as 'a literature of their own' (Earle, 2009, 158), as a substantive, charged component of the text itself. The covers have their own cloud of meaning, association and affect attached.

Indeed, in her introduction to the collection of extracts she edited, *Lesbian Pulp Fiction*, Katherine Forrest writes movingly of the importance of pulp paperbacks featuring lesbian characters and storylines, in a way that emphasises the particular role the covers played:

> A lesbian pulp fiction paperback first appeared before my disbelieving eyes in Detroit, Michigan, in 1957. *I did not need to look at the title for clues; the cover leaped out at me from the drugstore rack***:** a young woman with sensuous intent on her face seated on a bed, leaning over a prone woman, her hands on the other woman's shoulders. Overwhelming need led me to walk a gauntlet of fear up to the cash register. Fear so intense that I remember nothing more, only that I stumbled out of the store *in possession of what I knew I must have, a book as necessary to me as air*. (emphases added, ix)

It is the cover that elicits the reaction of recognition and identification in Forrest here; it is the cover that signals and acts as sign for this lifechanging site of 'queer pleasure'; connection to the image precedes the sustenance offered by the words. She senses from the cover alone that this is 'a book as necessary to [her] as air,' because the bodies of the women on its cover 'leap out at [her],' touch her, impress upon her body, stir something inside her. For Forrest here, the book *is* its cover, with the picture on the front answering a need within her before she even knows what awaits beneath. It is the cover that finds her, calling out to her 'read this book.' As Nicole Matthews says, it is the cover that helps 'to make sure that books reach their ultimate destination with interested readers' (xi).

As Forrest continues, it becomes clear in her account that book covers can inform, shape and even construct a text's readership: 'The book was *Odd Girl Out* by Ann Bannon. I found it when I was eighteen years old. It opened the door to my soul and told me who I was. It led me to other books that told me who some of us were, and how some of us lived' (ix). Seeing the cover was the first stage in this process of identification in which the subculture of 'trash art' (Bloom, 4) pulp paperbacks formed and informed her of who she was. Her eloquent writing of this experience suggests that the images and art we consume shapes the contours of the bodies with and in which we come to live.

'We Are the Creatures of Our Light Literature'

In Conrad's 1913 novel *Chance*, Marlow argues that the way a young man, Mr. Powell, thinks about marriage is a sign of the prevalence of fairy-tale stories with happy endings:

> And Mr Powell, being young, thought naïvely that the captain being married, there could be no occasion for anxiety as to his condition. I suppose that to him life, perhaps not so much his own as that of others, was something still in the nature of a fairy-tale with a 'they lived happy ever after' termination. *We are the creatures of our light literature* much more than is generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories. (emphasis added, C, 215)

Marlow interprets Mr Powell's failure to recognise the marital problems between the captain and his wife, as a reflection of the predominant social influence of fairy-tale narratives where marriage constitutes 'happily ever after.' For Marlow, it is popular narratives that teach us about the world and shape our understanding of each other; it is not the 'incontrovertible theories' of science that help us to identify ourselves, but 'our light literature.'

The idea that cultural representation impacts on identity formation is clearly nothing new. In *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction*, Scott McCracken echoes Marlow to argue that mainstream culture has a particular power to affect our understanding of who we are or who we could be: 'Popular fiction has the capacity to provide us with a workable, if temporary sense of self. It can give our lives the plots and heroes they lack. While the same can be said for all fiction, narratives read by large numbers of people are indicative of widespread hopes and fears' (2). The structure, order and even predictable outcomes archetypal genre fiction can

offer help us to make sense of the world around us; cliché can be comforting, as narrative patterns or character arcs play out in familiar trajectories. We might project the same patterns onto our own lives, hoping for the same comforting, predictable path, like Mr Powell in *Chance* believing in the safety and ease of the teleological 'fairy-tale with a "they lived happy ever after" termination' (C, 215).

This is not to say that fiction that is popular is necessarily unsurprising, or even that it is its predictability that works on us. The way McCracken writes of the power of pulp fiction suggests that there is something more subversive going on:

> The pulp in the title of this book, then, refers to two things. One is the fiction itself, which is cheap and disposable, but can be moulded to our fantasies and desires. The other is the self, which appears to be equally squashy and shapeless, but, equally and for that reason, can take up a multitude of new forms. If popular fiction turns the mind to mush, then that mush is also the fertile compost for new growth. (14)

In McCracken's formulation, we as readers are 'pulped' by the process of imbibing mainstream, digestable, consumable narratives that teach us about the bodies and the world in which, and with which, we live. According to McCracken, we are made and remade with each new cultural construct we read, each new layer of the palimpsest that writes us into being.

He elaborates, explaining how this effect on us as readers affects the cultural and social spaces around us too:

> The reader is also a product of the world, but, at the same time, she or he is an agent in that world, changing it through her or his actions. Despite the fact that it is often thought of as a passive and purely recreational activity, reading popular texts is part of this process of change. Popular fiction can supply us with the narratives we need to resituate our*selves* in relation to the world. The reader of popular fiction is actively engaged in the remaking of him- or herself and this act of remaking has a utopian potential. (emphasis original, 17)

The world we create for each other and ourselves, then, McCracken argues, is constructed through our consumption of popular, mainstream narratives and the impression they make on us, and the impression we then make on each other and our surroundings.

Rabinowitz argues something similar, contending pulps affected the cultural landscape in which they were consumed: 'In their quotidian nature, their everyday use, cheap paperbacks delivered art, eroticism, philosophy, literature, adventure, history, and science to vast numbers of people, and thus made an impact on American political and social life in unexpected ways' (34). The popularity the pulp paperbacks symbolised meant the archetypes, narrative patterns and constructs they sold could be traced in a changing and changed American mid-century society.

As Forrest's story suggests, the cover images could be particularly important in providing the visible social roles that shaped identity categories. Lesbian bodies, in Forrest's story, took up public space in the drugstore, materialising before her eyes to show her what was possible. That these bodies were salacious and sexualized is significant in that she was shown desire between women to be a licentious, predatory, dangerous temptation, even as

the text within may have offered her a different perspective. I return to Forrest because she offers a practical example of what McCracken and Rabinowitz talk about in the abstract. If the mushy pulp text can shape the mushy pulp reader, who can in turn shape the mushy world, as McCracken argues, the cover image might be the first and most immediate point of contact between all parties. Cover images shape and change what the text means because they represent the telling and selling of a particular version of the story and its characters. The bodies on pulp covers are made visible and allowed to pass through social, consumer spaces, as symbiotic signifiers of the text within, but also as constructs representing other bodies that might be allowed to circulate (such as a queer body in the drugstore). As Forrest, McCracken and Rabinowitz describe, these bodies in (and on) books teach us about the world we live in and who is permitted to take up space within it.

It follows, then, that it is significant when the bodies of women on the flip side of canonical Conrad – the bodies that stand for the powerful woman of colour who lies sandwiched between the salacious and the 'Conradian' versions of the text (the lurid front cover and the academic blurb) – are depicted as white. It is significant when Aïssa, who has a voice and identity and desires of her own, a Muslim Malay-Arab woman who shoots and kills the worthless white man she loves when she discovers he has lied to her, is depicted as his exotic, erotic subordinate. It matters when she is drawn as a protagonist, and it matters when she is not.

Aïssa, Pulped

In the following section I will look closely at the covers of four pulp paperbacks of *An Outcast of the Islands* (Pyramid Books 1959, Pyramid Royal 1960, Dell The Laurel 1962, Airmont Classics 1966), to explore the ways Aïssa has been paratextually (mis)represented. While each pulp cover positions her slightly differently, Othered, exotic and submissive to varying degrees, she is uniformly '*made present*' (to borrow from Genette) as an erotic supporting character (rather than protagonist) on every cover.

The scarcity of information I can offer regarding these pulp editions of Conrad is another symptom of the stickiness of his canonical position. The fact that I am able to access the doodles Conrad drew in the margins of his manuscript for *The Shadow-Line* if I so choose,[2] but not the sales and distribution figures, reader reviews or any other measure for the reception and consumption of these editions, speaks to what we have traditionally valued in literary scholarship. Barthes may insist that 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (1325), but, in my experience, it is still those 'origins' that literary criticism is most prepared to memorialise. This thesis stands as a testament to this cultural hierarchy. It is no coincidence that I know of Conrad's personal opinions about Maurice W. Greiffenhagen's illustrations (as

[2] See Warodell, Johan Adam. 'Conrad the Doodler'. *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2014, pp. 339-54.

I wrote about in Chapter 2), as well as many of the periodicals in which his works were published; these contexts intersected with 'Conrad' the author-God in his lifetime, while the pulps I discuss were untouched by Conrad (published decades after his death), and so have been left untouched by the scholarship that followed him.[3]

I have been worried about the speculative nature of this chapter (given my many unanswered questions regarding these pulps and my failed attempts to find out more about their 'destinations'), but I ultimately decided it was more important to write about what little I could glean from the covers themselves than to exclude them altogether for failing to fit neatly into my preconceived idea of a valuable academic object-text. These are images of Aïssa, and versions of 'Conrad', that undoubtedly circulated in their own world because they are still circulating in ours, and therefore they deserve to take up space in this thesis. The literary canon cannot evolve if scholarship is always confined to the limits of the author-God's touch.

Pyramid Books, 1959

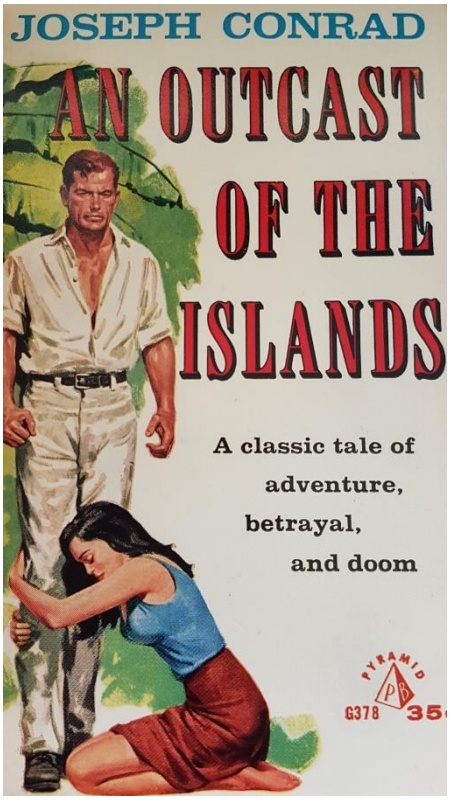

Figure 10 - *An Outcast of the Islands.* Pyramid Books G378. Pyramid, 1959. Cover art by Bob Stanley.

Selling the text as 'A classic tale of adventure, betrayal and doom', the 1959 Pyramid Books edition of the novel forecloses any hint at the text's central plot of miscegenation, as the characters on the front cover are both portrayed as white (Figure 10). Earle's work on the 1950 Signet edition of *Heart of Darkness* (Figure 11), suggests that this erasure was not because of a squeamishness regarding the depiction of interracial relationships: 'Signet is more staid but in general its art directors would mine the text for the slightest hint of salacious innuendo, no matter how contrived, and this would become the cover's subject. *Heart of Darkness* is typical of Signet's design' (2013, 52). Earle suggests that, if anything, the putative scandal of miscegenation would have been staged on the cover as a draw for potential readers, as publishers sold the most salacious version of the text possible. This makes the erasure of cross-racial sexual contact anywhere on the 1959 Pyramid cover of *An Outcast of the Islands* even more incongruous.

[3] David M. Earle is a noteworthy exception here. His work was the starting point for my interest in a 'pulped Conrad' in the first place.

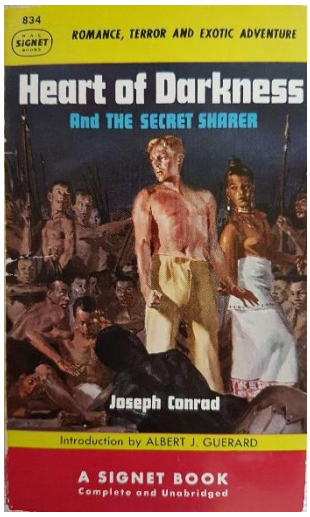

Figure 11 - *Heart of Darkness.* Signet Paperback 834. NAL, 1950.

Unlike the Signet *Heart of Darkness* cover, or the covers of the Pyramid Royal, Dell and Airmont covers that I will come on to, there is not even the merest hint of cultural difference between the man and woman depicted here. The white man, presumably meant to represent Willems, is portrayed as a hero: with his gaze set and his fists clenched, he is ready for action among the palm fronds of the jungle, and manfully ignores the clingy white woman at his feet (Women, eh?). In this version of the story, it is Willems who looks forward 'with fearless eyes' (OI, 51), 'with the steadfast heart' (OI, 51), who 'knows no fear and no shame' (OI, 48), rather than Aïssa.

Though Aïssa is described by Babalatchi as 'that woman with big eyes and a pale skin' (OI, 48), her cultural difference, her position as Other to Willems, is reiterated throughout the novel and informs the central actions of the plot. As discussed in Chapter 3, one of the battlegrounds of her cultural identity in the text is her decision to veil herself against Willems' wishes. That she, 'Woman in body, but in heart a man' (OI, 48), would thus be presented to any prospective readers with so much flesh on display, throwing herself at Willems' mercy, feels like an erosion of her character here. Her pronounced breasts, exposed thighs, bare feet, slim figure, wrinkled skirt, and pretty face below the bulge of Willems' trousers, all construct her as a sexual object. Her power – to enunciate her desires, enact her cultural identity and subvert the racial hierarchies working against her – is thus completely dissolved by this cover. The way she is posed, and the fact that this scene does not take place during the novel, leads me to wonder if this is even meant to be her that is illustrated here.

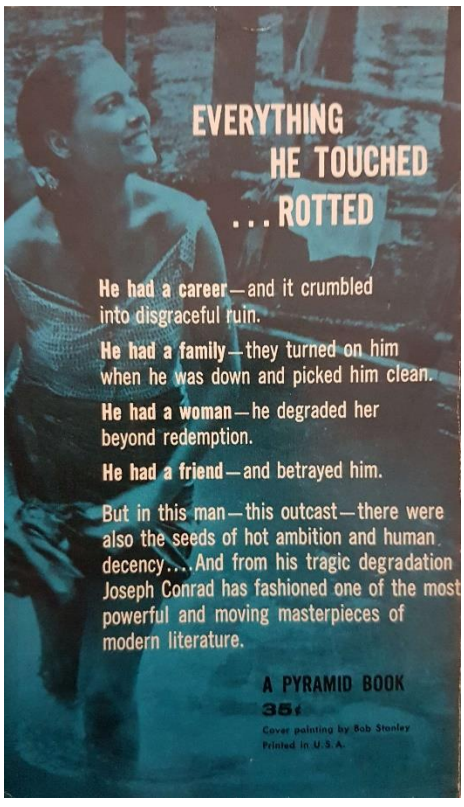

Figure 12 - *An Outcast of the Islands*, back cover. Pyramid Books G378. Pyramid, 1959.

The woman referred to by the text on the back cover (Figure 12) could just as easily be Joanna rather than Aïssa, as the 'family' and 'career' relate to Willems' life before he came to Sambir and met her. The image pictured alongside these words, however, is taken from the publicity that accompanied Carol Reed's 1952 film adaptation *Outcast of the Islands*. The still features Miriam Charrière ('renamed' "Kerima" by Reed (Dawson and Moore, 107)) in her role as Aïssa.

That it is this version of Aïssa from Reed's adaptation that materialises here, the one chosen to sell the story, further attests to the way her agency and power are co-opted by this pulp cover. As Catherine Dawson and Gene M. Moore write, 'Among the most striking aspects of Kerima's performance is the fact that she never says a word' (107). They go on to consider the various explanations that have been offered for this decision, from 'directorial brilliance, underlining the purely sensual nature of her relationship with Willems' to the 'practical necessities' of Charrière's French accent, before contending that 'Whatever the original reason, Aïssa's silence is emblematic of the "silencing" of native voices generally in the film' (108). Aïssa's figuration in Reed's film is defined by her silence; she is surrounded by white and Malay male characters who talk about her, while she cannot speak back.

Her agency is also circumscribed in this adaptation by the film's ending, as Dawson and Moore explain:

> Reed's film represents only four of the five parts of the novel [. . .] In the unfilmed part 5, Aïssa kills Willems [. . .] but in the film, final retribution remains safely in the hands of Lingard, who spares Willems' life but banishes him to a life of misery and isolation with Aïssa. This gentler ending was perhaps a concession to the Hollywood Production Code, which forbade the depiction of crimes that go unpunished; but it also reinforces the sense that the colonial world is rightly and properly subject to the justice of the godlike white man. (109-110)

Aïssa's anti-colonial protest is written out of the story in this version, so that the Aïssa of the film neither speaks nor acts against the imperial denigration that she contests so fiercely throughout the book. The fact that this Aïssa, silent, passive, victimized, should be used to sell the 1959 Pyramid edition of the text further reflects the way her character status is compromised by her depiction on this cover.

In terms of the specific still used on the back cover, the long dark plait codes the non-white body, but the blue filter denies further cultural identification. Her chest is exposed, as are her thighs, as she holds her sarong away from the water. The writing that positions Willems as the novel's protagonist and Conrad as the genius behind the masterpiece, literally overwrites the bare skin of Aïssa's cleavage, arms and legs. Aïssa is turned away from the prospective reader, looking up (casting her in a subordinate position), smiling, desirable and young, but tainted by the implication of the words 'EVERYTHING HE TOUCHED . . . ROTTED' being juxtaposed alongside her face, following the outline of her body. This smiling Aïssa does at least suggest to prospective readers that there is a woman in this text who does something other than kneel before men, but if they've seen Reed's adaptation, they might be surprised to find that she can talk (and shoot).

Pyramid Royal, 1960

Unlike its predecessor, the second Pyramid printing from their 'Royal' series of 'distinguished Pyramid books by outstanding authors' (Pyramid Royal, 1960, 255), features a distinctly

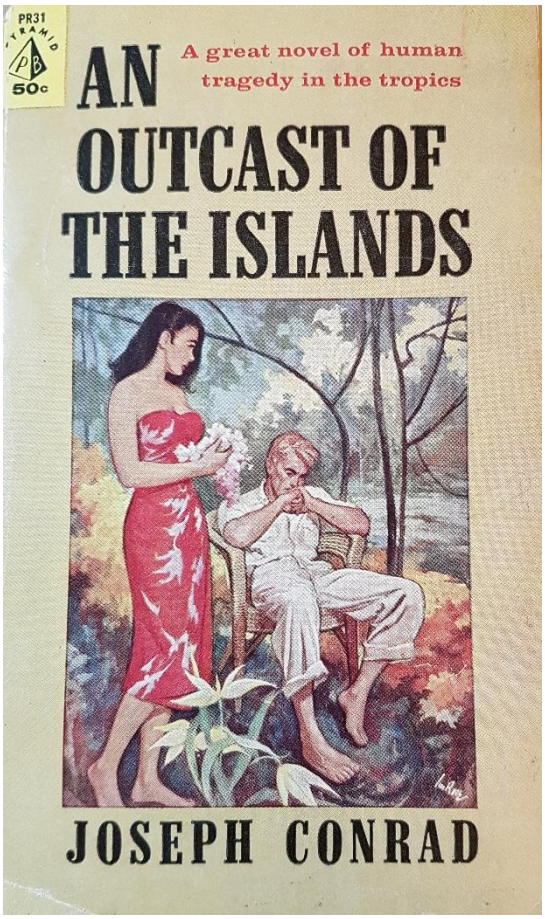

Figure 13 - *An Outcast of the Islands*. Pyramid Royal PR31. Pyramid, 1960. Cover art by William Rose.

exoticized Aïssa on its cover (Figure 13). The pattern and style of her dress, her hairstyle and the flowers she carries evoke colonial imagery of Polynesian culture, while her thick, dark hair, 'Orientalised' facial features, and skin tone cast her as Other to Willems' brooding, Aryan white male protagonist. Where he is portrayed stewing on his deep existential despair, pondering his plight in the middle of the foreign wilderness, the lone thinking subject in a mass of fructiferous tropical landscape, she is depicted waiting on him as his servant.

She is also exaggeratedly sexualized here, with her buxom, hourglass figure, bright red lips and dress to match; her fertile, tempting body is further symbolised by the blooming flowers she offers Willems, stressing her connection to the fecund fauna from which she emerges. For this version of the text, Aïssa is presented just as Willems sees her, as 'the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests' (OI, 64). Rather than the passionate and articulate critic of imperialism, the desiring and strident subject fighting for her love, or the empowered Muslim woman who refuses to take any more abuse and deceit from white men, Aïssa is made present as the penetrable embodiment of the colonial landscape. Aïssa materialises here without any of her power.

Dell, 1962

The cover for the 1962 Dell edition of the text resonates with a persistent trope of pulp covers, as Stryker explains: 'The popular "peephole" style of cover art, suggesting stolen glimpses of exotic interior territories at once psychological and geographical, literalized the voyeuristic appeal of early postwar paperback art' (7). As Stryker suggests, the illicit thrill of peephole covers rested on the excitement of seeing scenes, bodies and images that were meant to be forbidden, as the reader is invited to peer through outer concealments to glimpse the drama

within. On the Dell cover, we have apparently interrupted an intimate moment between a couple who do not know they are being observed (Figure 14).

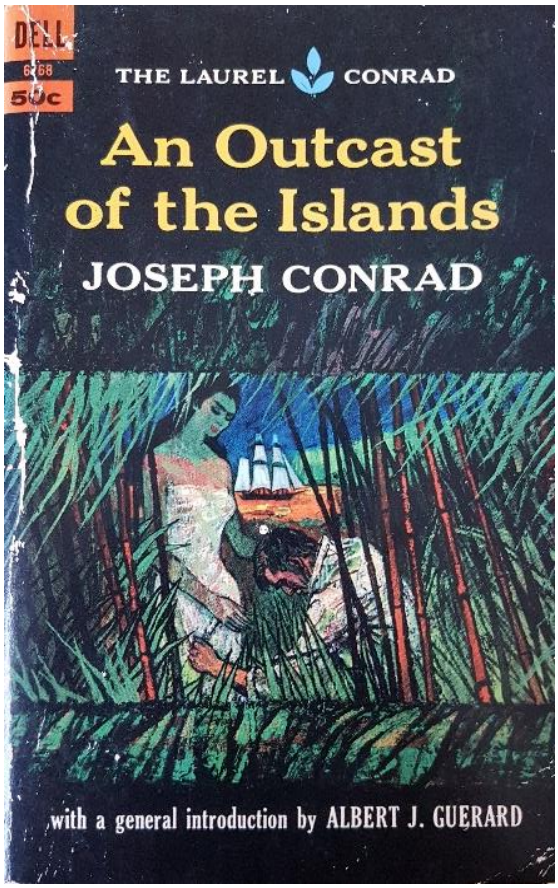

Figure 14 - *An Outcast of the Islands*. Dell, The Laurel 6768. Dell, 1962. Cover art by Richard Powers.

In contrast to the female figures on both of the Pyramid covers, Aïssa is presented here as the dominant character, as Willems kneels before her, begging and enthralled. However, she is still kept at a distance from the prospective reader who gazes upon the cover; her eyes are downcast, her attention is fixed on Willems, and her head is bowed and in shadow. Her connection to the exotic landscape is even more inescapable here than on the Pyramid Royal cover, as she is depicted half hidden in foliage, looming out of her forest dwelling to seduce Willems, who crumples before her. While her dark hair and eyes present her as Other, the patterned, bare skin, chest, and arms, and the accentuated curve of her breasts, position her as an appropriate erotic object to be looked at and lusted over. Though she may appear powerful here, as the archetypal femme fatale, her image is still designed in terms of the needs of the colonial male gaze.

Airmont, 1966

The cover of the Airmont Classics edition of the text (Figure 15) also depicts Aïssa emerging from the Malay wilderness, her embodiment as 'the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests' (OI, 64) emphasised by the fact that her dress is the same colour as the leaves that surround her. She is further away from the reader here, a background figure subordinate to and less

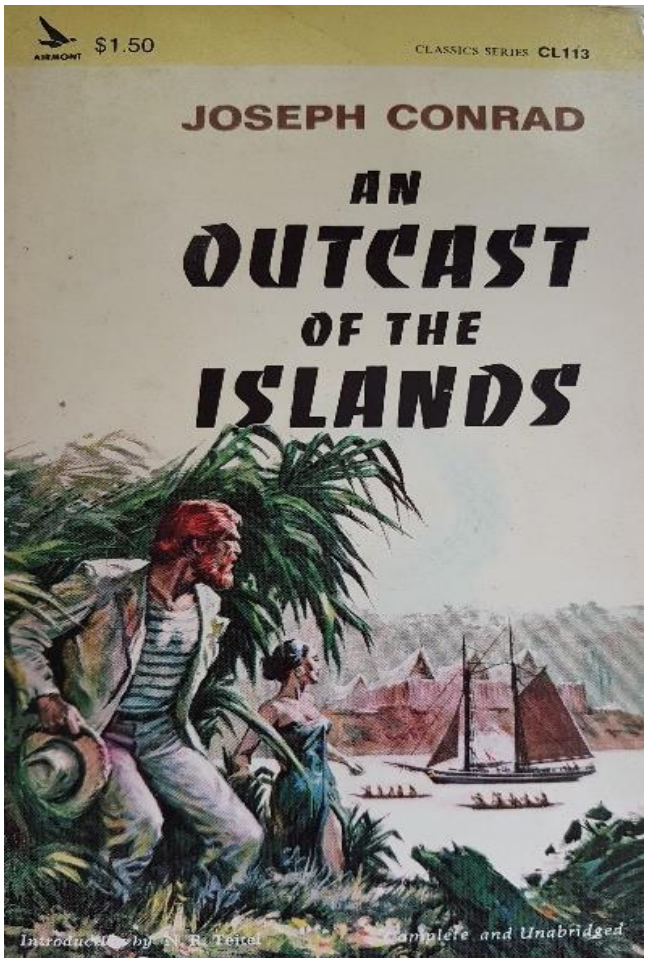

Figure 15 - *An Outcast of the Islands.* Airmont Classics Series CL113. Airmont Publishing Company, 1966.

important than the prominent (inexplicably ginger) white male hero in the foreground. Once again, her exoticism is established through her clothing, her dark, ornately decorated hair, and Orientalised facial features, while her bare flesh positions her as an erotic object to be leered at by prospective readers. That her dress barely covers her breasts, and her thigh is exposed even as her face is obscured, suggest that her identity does not matter, only her body. This is particularly obvious given the presence of Willems next to her, who has every part of his body covered (except his hands) and a hat in his hand ready to conceal the only part of him left bare.

However, she is presented as much more active here. Comparing her posture on this cover – head up, shoulders back, standing tall – to the kneeling Aïssa of the first Pyramid cover, or the static Aïssa of the Pyramid Royal and Dell covers, dramatizes the relative agency and purpose with which she is depicted in this image. Where her sole focus has been fixed on Willems on the other covers, she materialises in this cover art as a separate entity to him – further away, less important, but following her own path. She faces the action, danger and drama of the novel as a player in her own right. As much as she is positioned as a character at which prospective readers are encouraged to gawp, she's also someone for whom they might watch out.

Overall, the Pyramid, Dell and Airmont covers reflect the way the pulp paratexts neutralise Aïssa's symbolism as a subversive, articulate, desiring subject. The first Pyramid cover constructs the text as a story in which only white people have sex and only white men have agency, while the Pyramid Royal, Dell and Airmont editions sell a version of Aïssa marked as an erotic, exotic body, rather than the thinking, feeling, speaking protagonist of the novel. If 'we are the creatures of our light literature', and *An Outcast of the Islands* becomes light literature when printed as a pulp paperback, the 'creatures' created by these (para)texts are women of colour as passive object-bodies designed by colonial and patriarchal fantasies.

Aïssa is written out of the story by these pulp versions of the text, which insist that this is not a book about her.

Trojan Horse Covers

Yet, just as Antonia appeared to be excluded from 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in the periodical context of the serialized versions of the text, but became visible when we made a deliberate choice to see her, it is possible to find the real Aïssa all over these co-opting covers. Once again, I make an active choice to find *my* Aïssa here, to construct a narrative of these cover images that traces her ambivalent and ambiguous subject position.

One of the aspects of Earle's paper on the 1950 Signet edition of *Heart of Darkness* (Figure 11) to which I keep returning, is the part where he conjectures how a reader of the text would feel reading the story if they had bought it because of its cover: 'One can only imagine that a buyer of the 1950s might be disappointed in the story since it barely hints at the action depicted on the cover' (2013, 54). This equation between reader, text and cover that Earle interprets as inevitable disappointment, has made me ask a similar question: at what point would the Pyramid, Dell or Airmont reader discover the truth about Aïssa? When would they realise she was not 'the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests' (OI, 64)? When would they start to see her as a powerful woman of colour with desire, a voice to shout about it, and a rebellious enough nature to fire a gun at her awful lover? Would her circumscribed depiction on the cover affect their engagement with her? Would they ever see her as I do? I will never have answers to these questions. What I *can* say, is that in a culture dominated by whiteness, these trojan horse covers facilitated the circulation, and probable consumption, of a story from the colonial archive that featured a prominent Muslim Malay-Arab woman as a viable, identifiable subject.

The form of the pulp cover was particularly equipped for allowing people to see what they needed to see, especially those people who, in order to survive, had already developed certain ways of seeing (looking for trouble). Stryker argues that covers could be appropriated to reveal different aspects of the story within, by those 'in the secret': 'queer folks looking for a reflection of their own lives in the pages of a paperback book would need to be visually skilled in reading between the lines of deliberately ambiguous images' (32). The pulp cover worked, according to Stryker, as a *screen*, in multiple senses of the word, displaying and hiding in the same space. She continues: 'The relentless heterosexualization that took place on the covers of many queer books, presumably in an effort to widen their audience, sometimes made it virtually impossible to anticipate the story within' (32). The paradox of pulp covers, beaconing certain messages for certain audiences while occluding them to pass unnoticed by others, meant that the text within could be imbued with both conventional and subversive properties.

As Forrest's experience with *Odd Girl Out* in the drugstore attests, this meant that certain bodies and narratives that were forbidden by the orthodoxies of racist, homophobic,

misogynist culture were able to pass through public spaces, as Rabinowitz explains: ‘one might discover in the files of the New American Library [. . .] how millions of editions of books by black and gay writers were sold to a nation still living under a slowly cracking Jim Crow and solidly homophobic society, so that the decadent Sally Bowles spread across James Avati’s cover of Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* could seem *part of the national landscape*’ (emphasis added, 31). In being repackaged by the New American Library into pulp paperback form, writers such as Isherwood could circulate within and even be embraced as ‘part of the national landscape,’ part of a cultural cache designed to keep them out.

Rabinowitz goes on, arguing that this inclusion of black and gay writers within mainstream culture, facilitated by the ambiguous packaging of their works, changed the types of experiences mainstream culture could represent: ‘Circulating paperbacks, through their lurid covers and daring subject matter, made visible to wide audiences lesbian and gay experiences of emerging desire and homophobic encounters, African American perceptions of white racism and black cultural expression, modernist experimental prose, or scientific inquiry’ (35). Even as they may appear to be being excluded, new types of contact, new feelings, new subjectivities were being made present by enigmatic pulp cover art.

This ambiguity makes pulp covers the ideal form through which to trace Aïssa’s post-Conrad, non-canonical afterlife. She herself is a particularly ambiguous figure, as both the novel’s anti-colonial hero and its femme fatale villain (depending on who you ask). She rebels by conforming, by *behaving herself*, and is rebellious in her conformity; she submits to the will of the white man by desiring him, itself a transgressive act, and kills him because she cannot be married to him by his ‘white law’ (OI, 285). There is a fitting tension in the way she is drawn on the covers too. On the Pyramid Royal, Dell and Airmont covers, she is the Aïssa that Willems first sees, the sensual and enticing ‘spirit of that land of mysterious forests,’ the body through which he can access and assess the wilderness that surrounds him in order to take both sexual and cultural control. But as Willems is ultimately and unquestionably disabused of this assumption, so too would be any reader who picks up the book expecting to read about a subordinate woman. Even more striking is the subversive potential of the depiction of her as white on the 1959 Pyramid cover, as it directly echoes Aïssa’s own parodic performance as the mimic of white women: ‘“I am like white women,” she says,’ from this cover, ‘her arms round his’ legs (OI, 154). Here too, the reader enticed by this cover, looking for an obedient, subservient Aïssa, would consume the Aïssa ‘with fearless eyes’ (OI, 51) instead. Perhaps we can say this cover is *behaving itself* too.

It is worth noting that not all pulp paperbacks from this period featured an eroticized or exoticized Aïssa on the cover. The abstract cover art for the 1964 Signet edition of the novel (Figure 16) presents her as a multi-coloured fever dream, sprouting from the head of a masculine silhouette. Here she is literalized as a figment of a man's imagination, yet she is also positioned as the main character of the text. If the perpetual emphasis on her body on the Pyramid, Dell and Airmont covers positioned her as an object to be gazed upon and lusted over, the significance of her face, rather than Willems', being the one we can identify on this cover is paramount. This is her story, not that of the negative space signifying Willems. Here, she looks straight at the reader, straight off the shelf; this is my book, she says, come and read my story.

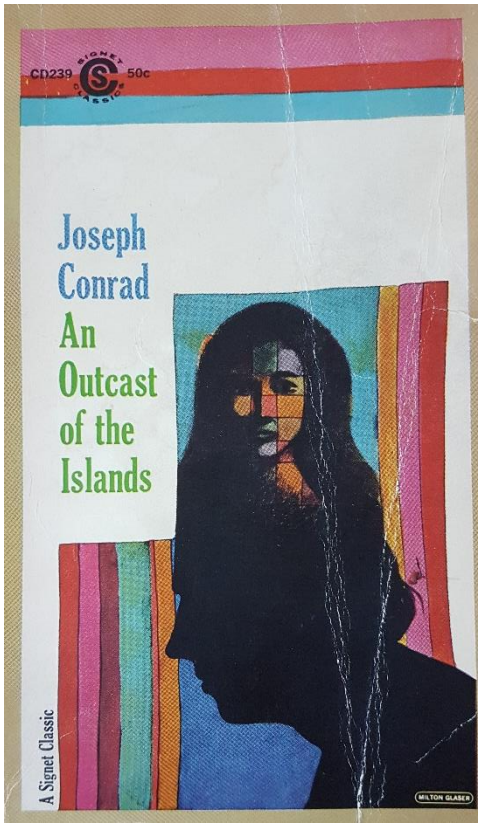

Figure 16 - *An Outcast of the Islands*. Signet Classics CD239. NAL, 1964. Cover art by Milton Glaser.

Ultimately, I cannot speak for what others read in the text, or how others would relate to these covers. Where my personal relationship with the periodicals, that I wrote about in Chapter 2, has always been much more obvious, it took Rabinowitz to remind me that pulps are personal too. She writes of her own fascination with pulp paperbacks, and her extensive collection, 'one keeps them because books, a library of paper garishly coloured, produce a spectacle, taking up shelf space, and accumulate weight when placed alongside others, their heft accruing meaning for the owner' (29). I have bought these pulp editions of *An Outcast of the Islands*, I have kept them, I have included them here despite the fact they raise many more questions than they answer, because in some small way it has meant that I have had Aïssa with me. Aïssa (hiding, performing, parodying, staring straight at me) has lived on my bookshelf; she has taken up space, accumulated weight, accrued meaning in this multi-coloured afterlife. These covers reflect her in material form; this is her materialised, this is her mattering, or at least mattering to me.

Published as 'trash art' (Bloom, 4), the highbrow associations that stick to our notion of that which is 'Conradian' are stripped away from *An Outcast of the Islands* when it is packaged in the form of a pulp paperback. The covers sell the story as consumable adventure fare, and its characters as archetypal ideals of white femininity and masculinity (in the case of the 1959 Pyramid edition), or as familiar figures of colonial sexuality, the imperial male subject and the

erotic, exotic ‘native’ female object (as with the Pyramid Royal, Dell and Airmont covers). Aïssa’s insubordination, her refusal to play the silent subaltern of imperial orthodoxies, is thus attenuated by the covers that position her as a sexual stereotype. The subversive pockets within the colonial discourse of *An Outcast of the Islands*, those breathing spaces in the text in which Aïssa’s voice, desires, and subjectivity are given as much, if not more, textual space as those of Willems, are thus written out of the version of the story the pulp paperbacks are selling. If ‘we are the creatures of our light literature’, then this light literature creates a culture in which women of colour are not protagonists, but extras, femme fatales, plot devices. Yet in keeping with the ambiguous nature of pulp cover art and the mixed messages they worked to promote, these covers also stage the performativity of both white femininity and the exotic Other role, that Aïssa represents. These covers are trojan horses, disguising a novel about a powerful woman of colour by packaging it in the putatively non-threatening and familiar imagery of white male supremacy. Sometimes the covers even let Aïssa be the protagonist, as the Signet edition shows. Ambiguous, difficult to pin down and plagued with contradiction, these material versions of Aïssa, at the very least, allow us to see her in colour.

Part 3: Are There Even Any Women in Conrad?

Reading 'Conrad' is a gendered act. When I first came to study him, during my undergraduate degree, I told my wonderful feminist friend that I was writing about his colonial fiction for my dissertation, and she asked, 'are there even any women in Conrad?!' She couldn't understand how I could be so animated by feminism and still find something valuable in his writing. A few years later, at a very posh dinner (at which it goes without saying I was completely out of my depth), the person next to me asked me about my PhD, and when I said I was studying Joseph Conrad's female characters (or 'Joseph-Conrad's-female-characters,' my stock PhD-explainer phrase that tends to come out as one rush of sound, to avoid follow up questions), someone across the table called out 'what, all two of them?!' and everyone laughed. He was making a joke; it was a joke that said, among other things, 'I know about Conrad and you don't', just as the woman at the conference was telling me, among other things, 'I've read *An Outcast of the Islands* and you haven't'.

Another, more recent, more unpleasant gendered Conrad encounter: I'm waiting to meet my friend in a café. I'm reading *The Rescue*. A man comes over to take my order and asks me about my book. He tells me he is a fan of Conrad, but has never read *The Rescue*. I say I'm writing my PhD on him, and that it is nice to meet someone else who likes him, because he's not very popular these days. He says 'do you mean the Achebe thing, because I think that's rubbish. That's just how they spoke back then', evoking Chinua Achebe's ground-breaking essay, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', with a dismal but depressingly familiar counter argument. This is another example of my work being misread as an invitation for a white person to discount racism. I mumble something ineffective and non-committal, and hope that he will leave me alone.

He is standing over me, very close, and I get the distinct impression I'm being chatted up. He is bigger than me. I consider telling him that my favourite part of *The Rescue* is where the white woman and the Malay woman gaze at each other, and that I'm really hoping they get together by the end of the book. I think about ways I can drop the fact I have a girlfriend into the conversation. Eventually my friend arrives, and he desists, but that evening I receive a Facebook friend request, despite the fact I didn't tell him my name. I recall that I paid for my coffee with a debit card; he must have made a note of my name from it, held onto it for several hours, and looked me up after work. Something about our Conrad chat, something I said or did in the orbit of 'Conrad', attracted this stranger's attention and told him that I would welcome being tracked down. Reading Conrad in front of him made me available to him, because certain discourses circulate under the sign of 'Conrad' – dictating what we say, how we say it, who does the saying and, apparently, *who we are* – and certain discourses do not.

I was reminded of this experience when I wrote, in Chapter 1, about the way Jones handles Graham Hough's archaic idea that 'very few women really enjoy Conrad' because 'the

women's world play[s] such a very small part in Conrad's work' (qtd. in Jones 2001, 7). That day in the café, I felt like I was being singled out as one of the fabled 'very few women', in a sort of 'You're not like other girls' power play. I remember realising that this man was impressed with me, that he spoke to me like the two of us understood something other people (like Chinua Achebe) did not, solely because of the author I was reading. If I had shouted 'I'M ONLY READING IT FOR THE LESBIANS' would that have changed anything?

If I am completely honest with myself, I can acknowledge that when I first expressed an interest in Conrad, there were elements of Hough's discourse that motivated me. 'Conrad' is serious, difficult, literary; I wanted to show that, *despite my gender*, I 'got it', that Conrad was for me too.

But, crucially, this is because I *do* find myself in his work, I *do* relate to his characters, and it has always bothered me that other people are surprised by that. Over the following two chapters, I present *Almayer's Folly* as an exemplary case in answer to my feminist friend's question, and consider how these 'women in Conrad' (both his female characters and the women who have embraced and reimagined his fiction) remind me that reading Conrad can be a feminist act too.

Chapter 5: . . . and Nina and Taminah and Mrs Almayer: Redistributing Character Status in *Almayer's Folly*

In this chapter, I retool Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, to present a feminist version of the text that prioritises the experiences and perspectives of women of colour, as well as the narrative events that take place between them. I explore how each of the Malay female characters of *Almayer's Folly* are individually presented in the text and the scholarship that followed it, before analysing their interactions to argue that their rich relationships structure the novel. First, however, I work through the traditional consideration of female characters in Conrad studies that have focused on gender, to reflect on a critical context in which the women of his writing are valued as singular, isolated figures in the canon. Against this backdrop, I present Nina and Taminah and Mrs Almayer, with a specific emphasis on the affective spaces *between* them.

Character Status

As I have argued throughout this thesis, 'Conradian' frequently denotes texts centring the existential angst, anxieties, desires and voices of difficult white men as narrators and protagonists, so that 'Conrad' materializes in literary scholarship as a writer of and for men. When Terry Collits, musing on his attempts to understand the 'elusive lost object we know as "Conrad"', describes him as 'a writer who found language a frustratingly inadequate means of penetrating the unknowableness of *a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst*' (emphasis added, 19-20), he very casually evokes a Conrad canon populated exclusively by white men. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness*, Jim of *Lord Jim* and Heyst of *Victory* are so evidently characterful, so acutely drawn and thoroughly rendered, in Collits' view, that they become synonymous with the type of human experience Conrad was trying to articulate. Collits constructs a corpus of Conradian characters, of the valuable subjectivities explored in Conrad's work (those that would encourage us to grapple with his works today), that are entirely white and male. Moreover, he makes them indefinite, generic – 'a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst' – as if they are non-specific, neutral inhabitants of the literary canon, rather than gendered constructs occupying delineated colonial roles, whose claims to characterhood are preconditioned on their race and gender. Collits tells us here that Conrad writes stories about white men, about white men like Kurtz, white men like Jim, white men like Heyst, and that their race and gender are so naturally constitutive of character status, that whiteness and masculinity are not even worth considering as factors that privilege certain types of narratives being represented in the literary canon.

Coming across such a heedless elision of the female characters to which this thesis is devoted reminds me that Susan Jones' call for 'the place of women [to] be recovered from the predominantly masculine tendency of Conrad criticism' (2001, 37) is work that is

necessarily ongoing. I propose an alternative list to counter the ease with which Conrad's entire output becomes synonymous with the impenetrable psyches of 'a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst.' Here, Conrad will be known as the writer of a novel about three women of colour: I value his work based on how he presents 'a Nina, a Taminah, or a Mrs Almayer' in his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*.

In redrawing Collits' list, I want to join feminist Conrad scholars such as Jones, and more recently Ellen Burton Harrington, who name Conrad's female characters as *characters*, women who take up space in his work. Jones asks 'If [. . .] Conrad identified with the daughters of his fiction, how might we reread the roles of Nina, Aïssa, Winnie Verloc, Freya, Alice Jacobus, Flora de Barral, Adele de Montevesso, whose sense of exclusion from the central narratives of men often match Conrad's self-confessed feelings of dislocation and despair?' (2001, 8). In doing so, she is giving these female characters room in the Conrad canon, by insisting on his connection to them. Harrington similarly insists on the importance of female characters in Conrad's work: 'Resonant female characters – Susan Bacadou, Winnie Verloc, Flora de Barral, Lena, Alice Jacobus, Rita de Lastaola, and Arlette, among others – are central to Conrad's later works' (2). Harrington's and Jones' clauses offer what Sara Ahmed might call 'wiggle room' (2017, 18) for Nina, Aïssa, Winnie, Freya, Alice, Flora, Adele, Susan, Rita and Arlette to materialize in Conrad scholarship. They are not quite able to take up as much space, or to luxuriate in it to the same degree, as Kurtz, Jim and Heyst when Collits provides them with those repeating, sprawling indefinite articles that position them as recognisably 'Conradian' characters. In many ways, my goal for this thesis is that it provides more wiggle room, like the lists of Jones and Harrington, countering the manspread of Collits' Kurtz-Jim-Heyst. I want to list Conrad's female characters in order to allow them to take up as much space in the writing *about* Conrad, as they do in the writing *by* Conrad. The list my thesis proposes is not as white, or straight as that of Jones and Harrington, and it is differently shaped. I am not as concerned with 'a Nina, a Taminah, or a Mrs Almayer', as I am with them all together, accumulating value and volume as part of a longer chain, with emphasis on the space in between them: Freya and Antonia and Edith and Immada and Aïssa and Nina and Taminah and Mrs Almayer.

Moreover, I am not so concerned with what they tell me about Conrad. Jones' list finds value in terms of the author-God, 'the daughters of his fiction' who we look to because he might have identified with them. Harrington, likewise, contends that 'focusing attention on his use of representations of women allows us as readers to better understand Conrad's craft and technique' (13). Debra Romanick Baldwin, similarly, argues that 'the increasing popularity of gender studies in Conrad scholarship is the result of not only the burgeoning of various critical approaches themselves, but also the relevance and complexity of Conrad's human vision' (132). I look to these female characters because they have lives of their own, and speak to human experiences that are not prevalent in the colonial literary archive, rather than because

of Conrad's 'feelings of dislocation and despair' (Jones, 2001, 8), or his 'craft and technique' (Harrington, 13), or his 'human vision' (Baldwin, 132). My focus is on what happens *between* Conrad's female characters, in an attempt to move Conrad scholarship past seeing them as single pivots, alone and unmoored.

The pivot is a recurring role for female characters under the sticky 'Conradian' sign. In 1911, Conrad wrote to Olivia Rayne Garnett to explain the role of Natalia Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*: 'That girl does not move. No excuse can be offered for such a defect but there is an explanation. I wanted a pivot for the action to turn on. She had to be the pivot' ('Appendix A12', 336). Natalia, as Conrad's pivot, is redolent of other female characters that populate his work: passive, stationary, isolated from other women (except a hag figure), but essential to the plot. They are often a central figure around which the action turns, a desirable muse creature who energizes and discombobulates the text's male protagonists. In this way, the recurrent 'Conradian' woman-as-pivot resonates with Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's description of Conrad's female characters: 'Whether ornamentally passive and destined to victimization or ominously elemental and potentially destructive, the Woman – capitalized, *singularized*, depersonalized like a force of nature – never attains the full status of a character in the fiction' (emphasis added, 153). This figured, symbolic, 'singularized' woman of Conrad fiction, that Erdinast-Vulcan describes, reappears throughout feminist Conrad studies.

Lissa Schneider, for example, highlights the repeated figure of the blindfolded torch bearing woman in Conrad's fiction, arguing that 'an analysis of gender issues in Conrad's writings must account for this recurrent feminine image both as idealized through allegorical art works [. . .] and as recalled in the constructed poses of female characters in [other] works' (11). Schneider argues the motif of the sightless light-bearing female body is one of the ways in which 'a thematics of gender suffuses Conrad's narrative strategies' (3). She uses this figure to trace an 'identifiably feminine "point of view" [. . .] that is present in fugitive ways throughout Conrad's canon' (4). For Schneider, then, analysing this figured image of over-determined womanhood constitutes a re-assessment of Conrad's work; finding this female image in his writing enables Schneider to put forward a case for Conrad as a writer concerned with women and gender representation.

Harrington also presents figured 'Conradian' women in order to posit Conrad as a writer concerned with female representation:

> He frames his critique through familiar sensationalized typologies of women demonstrated in his fiction: *women as objects of desire, the mother, the murderess, the female suicide, the fallen woman, the adulteress, and the traumatic victim.* Considering these figures through the roles and taxonomies that they simultaneously embody and disrupt, this study exposes internalized patriarchal expectations that Conrad presents as both illegitimate and inescapable in his fiction. (emphasis added, 3)

Both Schneider and Harrington argue that Conrad is drawing attention to the figuring of women, the way the image of the female body is contorted and over-laden with patriarchal

codes, and made to represent the paranoias and perversities of misogynist society. However, both Schneider and Harrington still choose to position Conrad's female characters in relation to reductive figures and symbols (rather than as complex characters deserving of academic attention) in their work. Harrington's list of the *types* of women in Conrad's work, to which she looks to see what they 'embody' rather than what they say or do, takes up more textual space than her list of his 'resonant female characters.' This suggests that there is a vocabulary for talking about Conrad's female characters in terms of symbols and signs of patriarchal culture that is much more readily available to us than the language to read 'female lives as rich in general resonances', in the way Rita Felski describes (17). This is not coincidental.

There is a powerful symbiosis between feminine iconography and the lived experiences of real women, as Marina Warner contends:

> Although the absence of female symbols and a preponderance of male in a society frequently indicates a corresponding depreciation of women as a group and as individuals, the presence of female symbolism does not guarantee the opposite, as we can see from classical Athenian culture, with its subtly psychologized pantheon of goddesses and its secluded, unenfranchised women; or contemporary Catholic culture, with its pervasive and loving celebration of the Madonna coexisting alongside deep anxieties and disapproval of female emancipation. (xx)

Warner highlights the fact that recurrent images of idealised women do not equate to helpful associations for real women, nor do they produce gender equality in society. However, she goes on to highlight the positive impact such imagery can effect, contending 'a symbolized female presence both gives and takes value and meaning in relation to actual women, and contains the potential for affirmation not only of women themselves but of the general good they might represent and in which as half of humanity they are deeply implicated' (xx). According to Warner, the figure of the woman as a symbol of goodness affirms, reproduces and makes visible a viably celebratory version of femininity.

But as Ahmed has argued, writing about the way 'woman' is constructed in canonical critical discourse, the 'symbolized female,' as Warner calls her, is formed through a compacted sedimentation and palimpsest of real female bodies:

> Thinking of the relation between 'woman' and embodiment in terms of over-determination [. . .] is a direct critique of any attempt to empty the signifier woman from the open and complicated history of its enunciation which over-determines the lived, corporeal experiences of women. Woman, as signifier, becomes a trace of the weight of female bodies [. . .]. (1998, 93)

For Ahmed, 'woman' is written and rewritten alongside, through and over the bodies and lives of real women. Ahmed positions herself against critical discourses that work 'to empty the signifier woman' of 'the lived, corporeal experiences of women', and in so doing she insists on a connection between woman-as-symbol and the discourses that touch, shape and twist the surfaces of female bodies through the weight of gendered expectations. She also redistributes the value of the woman-as-symbol, by suggesting that any positive association attached to the

female icon is rooted in female power, rather than male artistry. If 'Woman, as signifier, becomes a trace of the weight of female bodies', we can think of the figured 'Conradian' woman-as-pivot, as the bearer of a history of powerful, significant, embodied women, not a sign for the words of men. Thus, Ahmed both highlights the conflict between 'woman' and women, while also proposing a context for the figured woman that redistributes her singularity and places her, instead, in a context of collective female experience. Similarly, I hope to reinscribe the cultural capital of Conrad's figured female characters within Conrad scholarship, and draw attention to the relationships that take place between them.

I contend that Nina, Taminah and Mrs Almayer do all attain 'the full status of a character' (Erdinast-Vulcan, 153) because of the narrative space they are given in the text. Narrative perspective is an unstable, malleable component of Conrad's work, as Baldwin explains:

> all of Conrad's narratives are characterized by narrative structures that compromise narrative authority and resist omniscient narration. Conrad layers his voices in narrative frames, capriciously shifts the pronouns of the narration [. . .] and plays with free indirect discourse, ambiguously blending the narrator's voice with the words or thoughts of a character. Nevertheless, his narrators remain male. (136)

Baldwin argues that while Conrad experiments with the way stories are told, shifting focalisers to disrupt the idea of a reliable omniscient narrator, or even a stable narrative path, his narrators are ultimately always men. White male characters are undoubtedly given the most narrative space in his works, governing the perspectives through which we most commonly see his fiction unfold. However, the sheer volume of pages in *Almayer's Folly* that are given over to the thoughts, emotions and actions of female characters challenges the dominance of a universal omniscient narrator that can be assumed to be male in Conrad's work.

In the case of *The Secret Agent*, Baldwin suggests that the focus on (or through) Winnie Verloc disrupts the construction of a story being told by and between men:

> the narrative conveyed by a distant and ironic voice manages also to disclose or approach her [Winnie Verloc's] internal state in the oblique and cumulative fashion usually reserved for male protagonists, such as Martin Decoud, Lord Jim and Axel Heyst – characters the reader meets from the outside, so to speak, introduced from an external perspective of their outward appearance but whose interior points of view emerge through a series of flashbacks and increasing narrative subjectivity. (137)

Baldwin identifies the presentation of Winnie to be like that of 'a Martin Decoud [of *Nostromo*], a Jim, or a Heyst,' because the narrative investment in her psyche equals that of Conrad's male characters. I argue that Nina, Taminah and Mrs Almayer are all afforded the same textual space that Baldwin is describing here, as they become focalisers, agents and central players of the plot.

Plot Summaries

When Christopher GoGwilt argues that the 'political intrigues of *Almayer's Folly* are 'organized' 'around the blind spot of Almayer's "folly"' (82), he chooses to describe the text in terms of what Almayer does not know, rather than what Nina, Taminah and Mrs Almayer do. He presents the novel, and its prequel *An Outcast of the Islands*, as texts about the ignorance of white men, rather than the insight of women of colour:

> In *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands,* the political intrigue develops around the delusions of the two Dutch characters, Almayer and Willems, in whose ignorance Conrad epitomizes the presumptions of European imperialism. Lingard – an older Lingard, piratical patriarch of the trading company 'Lingard and Co.' – is a father figure for both Willems and Almayer. Yet in each case, the men's delusions for power are given *dramatic perspective* by women characters: Aïssa in *An Outcast of the Islands*; Almayer's wife, her daughter Nina, and the slave girl Taminah in *Almayer's Folly*. (emphasis added, 81)

GoGwilt centralises the white male characters, Almayer, Willems and Lingard, in his description of Conrad's first two novels, emphasising their place in the Lingard trilogy by reading them in relation to Lingard's timeline. In this construction, GoGwilt casts the female characters as plot devices, providing drama within the narratives of white male power, rather than functioning as literary subjects or citizens of the canon. GoGwilt undersells the fact that we identify the male characters as 'epitomiz[ing] the presumptions of European imperialism' because we see them through the critical eyes of intelligent, thoughtful, articulate women of colour. While GoGwilt gives consideration to the gendered power dynamics in these texts, he still structures them in terms of the men who populate them.

Alexia Hannis, while similarly gesturing towards a compelling reading of desire in the novels, equally positions the male characters as the active agents of the texts: 'While Dain's desire for Nina is open to that which is fundamentally inaccessible to him, Willems's desire for Aïssa – and her desire for him – are indistinguishable from colonialist power politics and the solipsistic rejection of alterity' (76). Hannis measures sexuality in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* in relation to Dain and Willems; female sexuality is relegated to a clause, in the case of Aïssa, or ignored completely, in the case of Nina. Hannis and GoGwilt reflect the way *Almayer's Folly* (along with *An Outcast of the Islands*) is casually conceptualised as a story defined by men and Empire. Taking Ahmed's advice that 'descriptive work is conceptual work' (2017, 13), I choose to describe the novel here as a story about women of colour, in the hopes of reconceptualising it so that certain characters, discourses and narratives within the text are brought to the fore.

Almayer's Folly is a story about women: active women, brave women, desiring women, clever women. *Almayer's Folly* is not a story about men. *Almayer's Folly* is not a story about white men. *Almayer's Folly* is not a story about white women. *Almayer's Folly* is a story about three women of colour and the plots they orchestrate together, for and against each other. *Almayer's Folly* is a story about things that happen between three women of different

ethnicities, ages and social standings. *Almayer's Folly* is a story about a mixed-race young woman called Nina, her Sulu mother and her Siamese friend Taminah (who has been enslaved).

Almayer's Folly is a story about a mixed-race young woman called Nina, navigating the warring factions of her cultural identity. Her mother, referred to as Mrs Almayer throughout the narrative, was captured by Lingard as a teenager after a 'desperate [fight] with the Sulu pirates' (AF, 10) (he mistakenly believes he is rescuing her from them). She is shipped off to a convent before being married to a white man, Kaspar Almayer, in an explicitly commodified patriarchal exchange: Almayer marries her in order to join Lingard's trading company, 'Lingard and Co.' Nina grows up in Sambir with two parents who hate each other, before Lingard takes her to a white family, his 'good friends in Singapore,' the Vincks, to be 'brought up decently' and 'taught properly' (AF, 25). She experiences traumatic racial prejudice in white society and returns to Sambir 'changed into a woman [. . .] with great sad eyes' (AF, 27). In Sambir, she listens to her mother's stories of her Malay heritage, befriends Taminah and falls in love with Dain Maroola, a Balinese prince who has travelled to Sambir to enlist anti-colonial support against the Dutch imperial forces in the region. When the Dutch catch him smuggling gun powder on his brig, he sets it alight, killing two Dutch officers. He returns to Sambir as a fugitive. Here, Mrs Almayer fakes his death (AF, 105) and convinces Nina to leave Sambir with him, towards a life as a '"great Ranee"' (AF, 121). Taminah overhears Mrs Almayer's plotting, and it is through her that we discover that the dead body that has washed up in Sambir is a decoy, and that Dain is, in fact, not dead; it is her that tells Almayer about his daughter's plans to elope with Dain, inciting the climatic showdown between Nina and her father at the end of the novel. Taminah, Nina and her mother are the galvanizing agents of *Almayer's Folly*, as I will continue to argue throughout this chapter, by first exploring the substantial narrative space devoted to each of their perspectives, before presenting the intensity of the bonds between them.

Nina

Nina's biracial identity is persistently posed as a threat to the other characters in the novel, as she occupies a putatively troubling position between discrete ethnic categories. When she is sent to Singapore to live with the Vincks, her racial identity is interpreted as dangerous to the white family unit, as Captain Ford, who brings her back to Sambir, tells Almayer:

> it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house. There's such a lot of fools about. There was that young fellow from the bank who used to ride to the Vinck bungalow early and late. That old woman thought it was for that Emma of hers. When she found out what he wanted exactly, there was a row, I can tell you. [. . .] What can you do? It is better so. Let her stay with you. She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. *You can't make her white*. (emphasis added, AF, 28)

Her ‘half-caste’ status makes her a disruptive presence that the white family cannot accommodate, particularly when she is perceived as more attractive than the white Vinck girls. Nina is blamed for attracting the attentions of the many ‘fools about’ generally, and ‘that young man from the bank’ specifically. Her skin colour is read as a sign of promiscuity, made to bear the weight of inappropriate male desire. Reminiscent of the way Antonia (who is also mixed-race) is punished by Heemskirk for the sexual transgressions he believes of (white) Freya, Nina is punished by Mrs Vinck, here, because she can be punished. Her treatment at the hands of the Vincks speaks to who can be spoken to and who can be held accountable for the vices of white men in colonial culture.

Her body, which cannot be made white, is appointed the natural bearer of sin, and the site upon which miscegenation ought to be policed, in a move that also reiterates its non-whiteness. The banker, as an upstanding member of colonial society, cannot be admonished, in case he can still be persuaded to marry one of the Vinck girls. Nina’s exclusion points to the imperial power dynamics that Ann Stoler describes, in which ‘social and legal standing derived not only from colour, but from the silences, acknowledgments, and denials of the social circumstances in which one’s parents had sex’ (1989, 635). In Singapore, a space she inhabits to be made white, a whitening space, Nina and her path through the world are entirely defined by her interracial parentage, which cannot be whitewashed.

However, there is a suggestion in Ford’s resignation and renunciation of Nina’s whiteness that the whole experience has further entrenched her troublingly ambiguous outsider status. In differentiating her from the Vinck girls, in insisting that she cannot be made white, Ford’s colonial rhetoric slips, attaching itself to ‘Those two Vinck girls [who] are no better than dressed-up monkeys.’ Ford suggests that next to Nina, the white female bodies around her also fail to be ‘made white’, their civilised European colonial citizenship looking more affected than Nina’s. Her non-whiteness is experienced by colonial culture as a worrying contagion. In the image of Nina, who cannot be made white, moving through the whitening space of Singapore, whiteness as a natural, neutral, invisible identity category becomes glaringly unstable and suddenly alarmingly unattainable for everyone.

While Nina is not white enough for European colonial culture in Singapore, she is presented as far too white for some of the Malay characters in Sambir. Babalatchi, the Rajah of Sambir’s ‘prime minister, harbour master, financial adviser, and general factotum’ (AF, 34) relays to his master, Lakamba, the secret details of Mrs Almayer’s plot to fake Dain’s death. When he describes Nina’s involvement in hiding Dain from the Dutch colonial forces, the threat posed by ‘the white side of her descent’ (AF, 38) is at the forefront of his storytelling:

> ‘And where did you say he [Dain] is hiding now?’ asked Lakamba, breaking at last the silence full of gloomy forebodings in which they both had been lost for a long while.
> ‘In Bulangi’s clearing – the furthest one, away from the house. They went there that very night. The white man’s daughter [Nina] took him there. She told me so herself, speaking to me openly, for *she is half*

> *white and has no decency*. She said she was waiting for him while he was here; then, after a long time, he came out of the darkness and fell at her feet exhausted. He lay like one dead, but she brought him back to life in her arms, and made him breathe again with her own breath. That is what she said, speaking to my face, as I am speaking now to you, Rajah. *She is like a white woman and knows no shame*." (emphases added, 104)

Babalatchi interprets Nina's willingness to speak directly to him, about physical, illicit contact with a man, as an expression of her whiteness. Nina's voice and unapologetic sexuality mark her as white and shameless to Babalatchi and Lakamba, invoking Aïssa's understanding of white women that I discussed in Chapter 3. Again, she is made to bear the mark of sexual indiscretion, as she does in Singapore, because she is out of step with the customs of the Islamic culture in which she finds herself. Not white enough for white society, too white for Sambir, she is perceived by others to be somewhere in-between these worlds and this makes her dangerous.

When Lakamba and Babalatchi try to think of ways to untangle themselves from association with the fugitive Dain, who is being hunted by the Dutch (the Orang Blanda), Nina's race proves a problem for them:

> 'He must not fall into the hands of the Orang Blanda,' said Lakamba; 'but let him die, if the thing can be done quietly.'
> 'It cannot, Tuan! Remember there is that woman who, *being half white, is ungovernable*, and would raise a great outcry.' (emphasis added, AF, 105)

Later, Babalatchi privately dwells on the problem Nina poses: 'And there was that half-white woman with threatening eyes. How could he tell what an incomprehensible creature of that sort would or would not do? She knew so much that she made the killing of Dain an impossibility' (AF, 108). While Babalatchi clearly experiences Nina's social and sexual confidence as a symptom of her white shamelessness, it is the *half* of her 'half-white' status that makes her 'ungovernable' and 'incomprehensible.' It is not that Babalatchi and Lakamba fear her because of her white heritage, because in the same breath they are plotting to deceive the Dutch colonial authorities who have considerably more muscle, as well as actual fire-power, at their disposal. She threatens them because her racial identity makes her an unpredictable subject who defies categorisation.

Amidst this context of overdetermination, in which her identity is signified by the people around her in terms of internecine cultural warfare, Nina manages to choose her own path with grace and dignity. At the end of the text, she is afforded the space to respond to the discrimination she has suffered. When Taminah informs Almayer of Nina's intentions to flee Sambir to live as Dain's wife, he confronts Nina with those same imperial ideologies that led him to agree to Lingard taking her to the Vincks in the first place: '"tell me, what have they done to you, your mother and that man? What made you give yourself up to that savage? For he is a savage. Between him and you there is a barrier that nothing can remove. I can see in your eyes the look of those who commit suicide when they are mad"' (AF, 144). Almayer sees

Nina's desire for Dain as a destructive delusion that will bring about social death. He goes on to appeal to her memory of her time in white society, asking '"Have you forgotten the teaching of so many years?"' (AF, 144). Nina's response forms a cutting indictment of colonial culture that is far more compelling than Almayer's whining: '"No," she interrupted, "I remember it well. I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate. I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay"' (AF, 144). Like Aïssa in *An Outcast of the Islands*, Nina is more articulate than any of the white men around her, piercing her father's lexicon of white supremacy to highlight the duplicities and cruelties of his treatment of her.

She is clear, concise and scathing of the violent patriarchal colonial codes by which he has forced her to live:

> You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions – the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love. You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife? (AF, 145)

Eloquently owning her desires, Nina positions Dain's love as the antidote to the anger and racial hatred she has experienced all her life. She is afforded the textual breathing space to counter Ford's version of events in which "it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house", so that we learn that it was more than 'deucedly awkward' to be 'a half-caste girl' in that house. Most striking is her vehement, acerbic emphasis on Almayer's hypocrisy, which also functions as a sharp defence of Dain, her mother and her own Malay heritage. Her devotion to Dain functions as a declaration of a cultural identity she chooses for herself: '"And I mean to live. I mean to follow him. I have been rejected with scorn by the white people, and now I am a Malay!"' (AF, 145). Nina frames her choice to be with Dain as a choice to be Malay, a choice not to be white; these are choices that animate her, choices that make her feel alive.

The space Nina's voice takes up in the text is substantial, and her critique of her father and the colonial culture to which he aspires, and in which she has suffered, is sustained throughout. In a further confrontation with Almayer, as she proceeds to leave Sambir, she reiterates the importance of her own agency:

> 'Can I not live my own life as you have lived yours? The path you would have wished me to follow has been closed to me by no fault of mine.'
>
> 'You never told me,' muttered Almayer.
>
> 'You never asked me,' she answered, 'and I thought you were like the others and did not care. I bore the memory of my humiliation alone, and why should I tell you that it came to me because I am your daughter? I knew you could not avenge me.'
>
> 'And yet I was thinking of that only,' interrupted Almayer, 'and I wanted to give you years of happiness for the short day of your suffering. I only knew of one way.'
>
> 'Ah! but it was not my way!' she replied. (AF, 154)

Nina, who listens 'to the voice of [her] own self', and chooses not to be white, who wants to 'live [her] own life as [her father has] lived [his]', speaks to him with clarity and candour again here. The courage and care of these words, in the face of her father's obstinate refusal to listen to her, might recall a familiar scene for many women who have found their choices repeatedly interrogated and dismissed. She stands up to a person who loves her and wants what he thinks is best for her, and speaks with compassion, in the face of a history of his coercion, to say 'your path is not my path'. She is staking her claim to a course of her own.

Finally, Nina articulates her own feelings about being between the two cultural worlds that have been fighting over her identity and ostracising her as a threat:

> Between you and my mother there never was any love. When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a peaceful refuge for my heart, filled with weariness and hatred – and mutual contempt. I have listened to your voice and to her voice. Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life? I had to choose – I hesitated. Why were you so blind? Did you not see me struggling before your eyes? But, when he [Dain] came, all doubt disappeared, and I saw only the light of the blue and cloudless heaven – (AF, 155)

Nina posits her ability to make her own sexual choices as the antithesis to the racialized, gendered life she has lived. She embraces a 'blue and cloudless' future with Dain, because it is what she wants, of that she is clear. She also acknowledges, though, the influence of her mother's voice, as well as the impact of her father's treatment of her mother. Nina shames her father into accepting his responsibilities as the parent of a biracial child. She holds him accountable for his sexual decisions, for the 'regret and shame of [his] life', turning the tables on the colonial culture that blamed her for the indiscretions of 'that young fellow from the bank', so that it is ultimately the white man, rather than the woman of colour, who is castigated for miscegenation at the climax of this novel.

To find this kind of resonant anti-colonial critique – powerful, piercing, delivered by a mixed-race young woman – in the depths of the colonial canon, reminds us that when we decide to record European cultural history through the work of dead white men, and when we make a further choice to remember that work as being populated by dying white men ('a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst'), we are also making a choice to *forget* characters like Nina, who are not dead, not white, not male. Nina emerges from within the literature of 'official European history' (Hellwig, 176) to renounce the hierarchies by which such racialized cultural distinctions have been built. Nina's voice is a breathing space.

Mrs Almayer

Nina's mother is ostensibly presented as the novel's hag; she is described as having a 'shrill voice, and witch-like appearance' (AF, 30), 'claw-like' hands and 'scant grayish hair tumbl[ing] in disorder over her projecting cheek-bones' (AF, 35). Linda Dryden sums up her depiction

when she writes of the way Mrs Almayer 'squats over a boiling cauldron much as one of the hags in *Macbeth*. She spits, snarls, and shrieks like an animal' (2000, 72). Dryden argues that Babalatchi and Mrs Almayer are 'both cast in roles of the sordid "native" degenerates working to undermine the white hero's enterprises' (2000, 72), however she convincingly contends that Mrs Almayer is ultimately presented as much more than this monstrous figure: 'Mrs Almayer first appears in the novel as a stereotype: the savage "native" woman motivated by malice towards the hero, a Malay Gagool. But this initial characterization is undermined by the subsequent revelation of her history and her dreams. Her essential humanity is revealed to us' (2000, 74). Dryden refers to the breathing spaces that recur again and again to perpetually counter the reductive, racist accounts of the white men around her.

Mrs Almayer is first introduced in the text in reference to 'the romantic tale of some child – a girl – found in a piratical prau by the victorious Lingard, when, after a long contest, he boarded the craft, driving the crew overboard' (AF, 10). This colonially sanctioned version of her origin story – where Lingard has 'her educated in some convent in Java', speaks 'of her as "my daughter"', and swears 'a mighty oath to marry her to a white man' before planning to leave 'her all his money,' – is promptly undermined (AF, 10).

We learn that 'on the day when the interesting young convert had lost all her natural relations and found a white father, she had been fighting desperately like the rest of them on board the prau, and was only prevented from leaping overboard, like the few other survivors, by a severe wound in the leg' (AF, 21). Not only is her role as passive victim rewritten here, but so too is Lingard's as the paternal white saviour, a position further destabilized by the fact she believes Lingard has taken her to be his wife: 'Being fourteen years old, she realised her position and came to that conclusion, the only one possible to a Malay girl, soon ripened under a tropical sun, and not unaware of her personal charms, of which she heard many a young brave warrior of her father's crew express an appreciative admiration' (AF, 21). While her interpretation is manifestly presented through a sexualizing colonial lexicon that mocks her ignorance, positioning it as primitive and corrupt, the paternity Lingard offers becomes inflected with something more sinister when it is read by this child as a sexual proposition. When the experience of the subject of his 'rescue' is staged by the text, Lingard can no longer be thought of as the romantic figure representing civilised morality that the narrative initially presents.

We are also offered a counter-narrative to Almayer's racial prejudice towards her, to his 'confused consciousness of shame that he was a white man' at the idea of 'companionship for life of a Malay girl, that legacy of a boatful of pirates' (AF, 12). Ten pages on from Almayer's version, we return to the wedding ceremony, in 'the centre of an interested circle of Batavian society,' to see 'the young convert stood before the altar with an unknown and sulky-looking white man' (AF, 22). This retelling of the wedding privileges the nameless Malay bride as she is depicted as decidedly more sympathetic than Almayer: 'while swearing fidelity, he was

concocting plans for getting rid of the pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future. She, however, had retained enough of conventual teaching to understand well that according to white men's laws she was going to be Almayer's companion and not his slave, and promised to herself to act accordingly' (AF, 22). It is the 'native' woman who upholds the virtues of imperialist Christianity here, rather than the white man who has just married himself into a colonial agency (Lingard and Co.). The newly-Mrs Almayer interprets the codes of Western wifehood to which she pledges as markers of her equal subject status, rather than subordination, making a choice to make the relationship work for her. Almayer, meanwhile, plots her death – what a catch!

Moreover, in becoming Mrs Almayer she rips apart the very codes of white male power to which her new name would suggest she conforms. When Hannis proposes her convincing argument that Europe is figured as an object of desire for Almayer in *Almayer's Folly*, she discusses a passage detailing the dynamics of 'the parental bungalow' on the 'poisonous shores of Java' where Almayer grew up (AF, 8). Writing of Almayer's mother, who 'from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up' (AF, 8), Hannis posits 'it is easy, the passage implies, to characterize Europe as glorious, "from the depths of [a] long easy chair," an image that connotes a bed where Mrs Almayer would sleep, suggesting that her desire for Europe is vivified by dreams' (82). In calling Almayer's mother 'Mrs Almayer,' Hannis conflates the nameless Sulu child Almayer marries with his white mother. Furthermore, in describing Almayer's mother as a character who represents the colonial dream of Europe, the way European society and culture are privileged as idealised in peripheral colonial cultures, and using the sign 'Mrs Almayer', Hannis melds the 'betel-nut chewing mother [of Nina], squatting in a dark hut, disorderly, half naked, and sulky' (AF, 27), to 'the mother [of Almayer] bewail[ing] the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she [was] the daughter of a cigar dealer there' (AF, 8). In calling this white woman, who constitutes Almayer's claim to European heritage in the novel, by the only name by which 'her who was the regret and shame' of Almayer's life (AF, 155) is known, Hannis highlights another slippage in the colonial lexicon of the novel. If Almayer's mother, who he sees as a symbol of his racial purity (his European lineage), and his wife, who he sees as a symbol of the dilution of his racial purity (his interracial marriage), can be known under the same sign, then those competing discourses of purity and dilution collapse into meaninglessness as the binary upon which they are founded disintegrates. Even in her namelessness, then, Mrs Almayer represents the subversion of the imperial codes that surround her.

The slippage within the name 'Mrs Almayer' is emblematic of the fact that for every moment of denigration or colonial stereotype, the text offers a counter-narrative of this character that destabilises the European cultural codes that have marked her as monstrous. Almayer attributes her 'burning the furniture, and tearing down the pretty curtains' to 'her unreasoning hate of those signs of civilisation', thinking of these acts as 'outbursts of savage

nature' (AF, 25). However, her 'savagery' is later deconstructed, as it transpires that she 'had torn off the curtains to make sarongs for the slave-girls, and had burnt the showy furniture piecemeal to cook the family rice' (AF, 75). This textual detail is not lost on Dryden, who argues these actions indicate that Mrs Almayer has 'a greater awareness of her responsibilities than her husband displays' (2000, 73). Dryden concludes that 'For all the superficial characterization of this woman as a savage, a slatternly hag, even a latter-day Caliban, [. . .] she is more resourceful and has more social consciousness than her white husband' (2000, 73). Supporting Dryden's reading, I would further contend that these acts, in which Mrs Almayer takes responsibility for the running of the household and the wellbeing of everyone in it, position her as the real head of the family. That her acts of care can only register in the prejudice of Almayer's focalisation as disorderly acts of vandalism designed to incite a reaction from him (rather than the women of the household to whom her actions are directed), does not mean the text supports his interpretation of her behaviour.

Another point at which Mrs Almayer appears through the lens of her husband's misogyny and racism, is in his memory of her reaction to Lingard taking Nina away to be 'brought up decently' by the Vincks:

> To his great surprise she took the news very quietly, giving only him and Lingard a furtive glance, and saying not a word. This, however, did not prevent her the next day from jumping into the river and swimming after the boat in which Lingard was carrying away the nurse with the screaming child. Almayer had to give chase with his whale-boat and drag her in by the hair in the midst of cries and curses enough to make heaven fall. Yet after two days spent in wailing, she returned to her former mode of life, chewing betel-nut, and sitting all day amongst her women in stupefied idleness. (AF, 25-26)

As Dryden points out, the suggestion that Mrs Almayer cooks for the household and makes clothes for Almayer's slaves 'belies the "stupefied idleness"' (2000, 73) he accuses her of here. The disproportionate brutal violence he enacts upon her to keep her from her own child further distances him from the sympathetic reader. Yet, Mrs Almayer is undeniably presented here as both the sexist stereotype of the hysterical woman, and the racist stereotype of the 'native' degenerate, at first sly, then wild, then indolent.

But again, this passage is countered when Nina comes to leave Sambir with Dain. Her mother recounts her experience of this moment, and urges Nina not to return to her father's side to say goodbye:

> 'No, he sleeps now the sleep of gin; and if you went back he might awake and see you. No, he shall never see you. When the terrible old man took you away from me when you were little, you remember–'
>
> 'It was such a long time ago,' murmured Nina.
>
> 'I remember,' went on Mrs. Almayer, fiercely. 'I wanted to look at your face again. He said no! I heard you cry and jumped into the river. You were his daughter then; you are my daughter now. Never shall you go back to that house; you shall never cross this courtyard again. No! no!' (AF, 122)

That Mrs Almayer's memory is voiced in the text means that the story of the imperial benevolence of Nina's 'whitening' is reinscribed as one of the colonial violence of her kidnap. Where Almayer thinks of his wife as 'the savage tigress deprived of her young' (AF, 25) when the story is told from his perspective, the text ultimately presents her as a character with an equally, if not more, valid outlook on the event, staging her entirely human parental grief versus the savagery of 'the terrible old man' who took her daughter away and the husband who refused her contact with her child. The putative irrational wildness of her actions, jumping into the river after the boat, are explained as she remembers responding to her daughter's distress. Mrs Almayer also emphasises the mirroring between these two moments of Nina's departure, drawing attention to the fact that her husband's brand of parenting involves Nina being *taken*, whereas her relationship with Nina facilitates her daughter *escaping*: 'You were his daughter then; you are my daughter now.' Even though it reminds her of another, harder parting, Mrs Almayer helps Nina to leave because it is what her daughter wants. As Dryden argues, this is a particularly poignant characterisation of Mrs Almayer's approach to motherhood: 'Her motherly advice to Nina, her eagerness for her daughter's departure (she will presumably never see Nina again) indicate a wisdom and an unselfish parental concern that are beyond the capabilities of her egoist husband' (2000, 73-74). Dryden's work suggests that if Mrs Almayer was the character her husband believes her to be, 'the savage tigress', she would not be devoting so much of her energy, with so much affection, to this second departure. That Mrs Almayer advises her daughter so emphatically and encourages her so explicitly, suggests a much deeper devotion to her daughter's happiness than her husband exhibits.

In an echo of their initial parting, Mrs Almayer propels Nina's boat onto the river, driving her towards a future in which they will never see each other again:

> She put out all her strength, and swinging her body over the water, shot the light craft far into the stream. When she recovered herself from the effort she tried vainly to catch a glimpse of the canoe that seemed to have dissolved suddenly into the white mist trailing over the heated waters of the Pantai. After listening for a while intently on her knees, Mrs. Almayer rose with a deep sigh, while two tears wandered slowly down her withered cheeks. She wiped them off quickly with a wisp of her grey hair as if ashamed of herself, but could not stifle another loud sigh, for her heart was heavy and she suffered much, being unused to tender emotions. (AF, 125)

She physically sends her daughter towards a future 'blue and cloudless heaven' – to which she has been and will continue to be denied access – along the same body of water that carried her away as a screaming child. She is emotional, not as the hysterical degenerate here, but as the 'heavy-hearted, much-suffering' mother of a lost daughter. Dryden's reading of this passage is especially moving: 'Her unfamiliarity with "tender emotions" is a reminder of her "savage" nature, but also indicates the hardships of life as Almayer's wife: those "tender emotions" have been stifled in order to survive' (2000, 74). Dryden acknowledges the colonial traces that always inflect descriptions of Mrs Almayer in the text, but she recodes this moment to convincingly read the suggestion of Mrs Almayer's callousness (her unfamiliarity with

tenderness), as a strategic response to the cultural violence with which she has lived for so many years. Dryden's reading makes the scene of Mrs Almayer crying on the riverbank all the more affecting. Her writing on Mrs Almayer models an admirable critical awareness that gives space to the parts of Conrad's narratives that are not about white men; she explores the characterisation of Mrs Almayer in a way that reflects her presence in the text, to look for the versions of this woman that lie outside of the imperial patriarchal gaze that relies on seeing her as the hag. I am thankful for the way she allows Mrs Almayer to materialize in her work; this is a breathing space in Conrad scholarship.

Taminah

In the centre of *Almayer's Folly*, the narrative shifts to follow Taminah, a young woman from Siam who has been enslaved. Her existence is described in terms that are startlingly redolent of Spivak's 'doubly effaced' (32) female subaltern, who lives 'without lines of social mobility' (28):

> She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either. The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except of a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger [. . .] (AF, 92)

Taminah's life is presented as hopeless, loveless and small, confined to the same limited scenery. This has sometimes led to her being dismissed in criticism, in which she repeatedly materializes as 'slave girl', where she materializes at all. Robert Hampson writes that 'for most of the novel she wanders unconsciously through the settlement, focused on selling pastry from a tray balanced on her head' (2009, 54). Hampson's language suggests that he does not recognise her as a viable protagonist, as he engages with her as an object-body to be looked at, defined by its role in the cycle of labour (slave), rather than as a character through whom the narrative is focalised. Hampson watches Taminah wandering through the settlement, but in the novel we walk alongside her, seeing what she sees or rather what she does not, 'no other sky, no other water, no other forest.'

Hannis, too, writes of this passage in ways that foreclose identification with Taminah: 'The comparison between the palms and the girl would seem to repeat the trope of the primitive: she is unconscious and continuous with Nature [. . .] Taminah's character, however, is not a mere perpetuation of an Orientalist trope, but rather works within the trope of the primitive in order to throw it into question' (100-101). In framing Taminah's characterisation in terms of 'the trope of the primitive', whether because she represents Orientalist stereotypes associating the 'native' with nature, or because she 'works within' those tropes, Hannis insists that Taminah be read in relation to primitivism. She interprets the metaphors that make up the vocabulary of Taminah's focalisation as signs of her ignorance, rather than as eloquent, lyrical

expression. Both Hannis and Hampson ignore the simple but significant detail of this passage: the reason we know Taminah walks through the settlement, the reason we see her in relation to 'the tall palms', is because this point of the narrative comes from her perspective. The eight pages of concentrated Taminah focalisation at the centre of the novel position her as a substantial character with which readers are encouraged to identify.

Indeed, the reader discovers the main plot twist of *Almayer's Folly* through Taminah's focalisation: 'As she approached Sambir she could see the excitement and she heard with momentary surprise of the finding of Dain's body. It was not true, of course. She knew it well. She regretted that he was not dead. She should have liked Dain to be dead, so as to be parted from that woman – from all women' (AF, 96). The surprise that the body discovered is not Dain's is transmuted into Taminah's resigned register, so that her feelings of jealousy towards Dain and Nina's relationship dominate our understanding of this plot development; her subjectivity cannot be written out of this crucial point in the narrative.

GoGwilt acknowledges the importance of Taminah here, describing her as something akin to a lynchpin: 'Taminah's awareness of this secret, [. . .] provides political awareness of all the various intrigues developing around the blind spot of Almayer's folly. Taminah's knowledge – along with Almayer's ignorance – has the power to destroy the intricate balance of different ethnic, political, and economic interests defining the fragile politics of Sambir' (84). The fact that GoGwilt recognizes the central significance of Taminah, repeatedly evoking this plot twist as her secret, her 'awareness', her 'knowledge', makes his choice to continue to frame the machinations of the narrative in terms of Almayer's blindness all the more glaring. That Almayer is not aware of Dain's faked death seems to be more important for GoGwilt than that Taminah, a nominally subordinate character who appears to be without any power, agency, or worldly possessions, knows more than any of the colonial powers about what is happening in Sambir. GoGwilt does continue to stress the significance of Taminah's perspective on this situation, as he contends that 'Taminah's consciousness, [. . .] governs the reader's unfolding sense of how dependent Sambir is on a whole set of contingent economic and political interests' (84). However, the relevance of Taminah's viewpoint for GoGwilt is in terms of what she can tell us about the political background of the novel, rather than her experiences as a character. In placing value on Taminah's focalisation because of its proximity to 'a whole set of contingent economic and political interests', GoGwilt misses the fact that Taminah's focalisation *in itself*, in existing at all, never mind to such a substantial degree, is powerful and subversive. Taminah's focalisation means that the first novel of a stalwart of the colonial archive is one in which white men do, say and see less than sympathetic, courageous, complicated Malay women. *Almayer's Folly* belongs to these women, who govern, relay and organize the plot.

Between Women

Having briefly explored the way Nina, Taminah and Mrs Almayer take up space in the text individually, I will now turn my attention to the ways they interact, as well as how much weight their relationships are afforded in the text itself and the scholarship surrounding it.

Nina and Her Mother

The relationship between Nina and her mother, while central to the narrative, as I will argue, is rarely explored in Conrad scholarship. GoGwilt values it in much the same way as he values Taminah's focalisation, because of what it tells us about 'political and economic' factors: 'the memory of Mrs Almayer's past, retold to Nina in the present, illuminates the political and economic significance of piracy as it informs the Lingard trilogy and all of Conrad's Malay tales' (82). While GoGwilt's focus is on the construction of Malay colonial politics in Conrad's canon, the way he employs the breathing spaces in the text where Mrs Almayer and Nina share history, dilutes the power of these moments by taking away any of the poignancy of the connection *between* these women. The narratives Mrs Almayer shares with her daughter are significant on their own terms, rather than as the means through which colonial history may be measured. When read more recuperatively, with a greater awareness of the women giving and receiving them respectively, they offer a different account of colonial history altogether, one inhabited by women of colour who are animated by their interactions with each other.

The sharing to which GoGwilt refers is constituted by Mrs Almayer's 'childhood reminiscences' which she delivers to Nina 'in a kind of monotonous recitative'; she describes 'the glories of the Sultan of Sulu, his great splendour, his power, his great prowess; the fear which benumbed the hearts of white men at the sight of his swift piratical praus' (AF, 36). These oral narratives of Malay history passing between mother and daughter develop into personal memories that are resonant for both of them: 'And these muttered statements of her grandfather's might were mixed up with bits of later recollections, where the great fight with the "White Devil's" brig and the convent life in Samarang occupied the principal place' (AF, 36). Mrs Almayer tells her daughter of her experience as Lingard's captive, countering the colonial stories of her 'rescue', 'conversion' and haggy degeneration with which Nina will have grown up. In sharing her own version of 'convent life in Samarang' with her daughter she is evoking the communal experience of racial humiliation and violence which they have both suffered, speaking it out loud so that it passes between them as contact and connection.

Nina seems to receive her mother's stories as markers of affinity, as they relate to and repeal the colonial education she herself experienced:

> And listening to the recital of those savage glories, those barbarous fights and savage feasting, to the story of deeds valorous, albeit somewhat bloodthirsty, where men of her mother's race shone far above the Orang Blanda, she felt herself irresistibly fascinated, and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away

> and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss. Strangest of all, this abyss did not frighten her when she was under the influence of the witch-like being she called her mother. (AF, 37)

This passage exemplifies the colonial rhetoric that inflects the way the story of the relationship between Nina and her mother is told in the text. Oral Malay history is registered in terms of savagery and barbarism, 'savage glories, barbarous fights, savage feasting', populated by figures more 'bloodthirsty' than white men. The influence of imperialism on Nina's life, meanwhile, is described as a benevolence, 'the narrow mantle of civilised morality' bestowed by 'good-meaning people.' However, by this point in the text, it is already clear that Nina's colonial education was not benevolent, and that the Vincks were not 'good-meaning people'; even the colonial rhetoric snags here, with 'wrapped' reading so easily as 'warped.' Significantly, even within this colonial discourse, it is clear that Nina does not experience 'the influence of the witch-like being she called her mother' as the horrifying defilement imperial culture, and her white father, would suppose. In fact, these moments with her mother begin to inform how she identifies herself: 'she listened with avidity to the old woman's tales of the departed glories of the Rajahs, from whose race she had sprung, and she became gradually more indifferent, more contemptuous of the white side of her descent represented by a feeble and traditionless father' (AF, 38). While the colonial rhetoric of the narrative again undermines their relationship (a narrative voice that casts Nina's mother as 'the old woman' and Almayer as her 'father'), Nina evidently takes value from the reminiscences of her mother in terms of what they tell her about their shared cultural identity.

Moreover, the connection that forms between Nina and her mother, through Mrs Almayer's storytelling, patently shapes her desire for Dain, whom she sees as 'the embodiment of her fate, the creature of her dreams [. . .] the ideal Malay chief of *her mother's tradition*' (emphasis added, AF, 55). Dain manifests before her as an embodiment of the Malay heritage about which her mother has been educating her. For Mrs Almayer, in turn, Dain offers her daughter the life that was taken from her by Lingard's colonial violence: '"I was a slave, and you shall be a queen"' (AF, 121). Dain represents a shared future, as well as a shared heritage, for both of them; even if it is only Nina who has a chance to access it, both she and her mother dream of the 'blue and cloudless heaven'. When Mrs Almayer emphatically encourages Nina to pursue this future, even though it will mean they have to part forever, she positions it as a renunciation of and remedy to the life she led in white society:

> 'Give up your old life! Forget!' she said in entreating tones. 'Forget that you ever looked at a white face; forget their words; forget their thoughts. They speak lies. And they think lies because they despise us that are better than they are, but not so strong. Forget their friendship and their contempt; forget their many gods. Girl, why do you want to remember the past when there is a warrior and a chief ready to give many lives – his own life – for one of your smiles?' (AF, 123)

For Mrs Almayer, Dain represents the chance for her daughter to forget the trauma of her 'whitening' and ascend to a powerful position in Malay society alongside 'a warrior and a chief' who, unlike those who 'speak lies,' will do anything for 'one of [her] smiles'. Being with Dain, Mrs Almayer urges her daughter, will undo the damage of the discourses that have denigrated them both. In this way, she also views the remedy offered by Dain's un-whitening potential as an evocation of their relationship, another way in which '"you were his daughter then; you are my daughter now"' (AF, 122).

Nina's relationship with Dain is completely tied up with being her mother's daughter, as it is Mrs Almayer's support that allows them time together:

> Mrs Almayer had undertaken the easy task of watching her husband lest he should interrupt the smooth course of her daughter's love affair, in which she took a great and benignant interest. She was happy and proud to see Dain's infatuation, believing him to be a great and powerful chief, and she found also a gratification of her mercenary instincts in Dain's open-handed generosity. (AF, 55)

Mrs Almayer facilitates their relationship; 'Dain's open-handed generosity' refers to the silver coins he pays Mrs Almayer for the privilege of enabling his contact with Nina. This dowry, which Dain accrues trafficking gun powder in defiance of Dutch colonial rule, is paid to Nina's mother, without the knowledge of her father. It thus represents an inverted colonial patriarchal economy. The anti-colonial indigenous hero trades the money he has earned plotting against colonial rule with the indigenous mother of the half-white woman he wants as queen when he takes sovereignty of his island (in defiance of the white father's attempts to 'make her white'). The dowry points to a formulation in which, Nina (who is 'like a white woman' (AF, 104)) passes between Malay warriors (Dain and her mother) for the advancement of Malay independence, and the erosion of her father's patriarchal power.

However, Mrs Almayer's involvement in Nina and Dain's relationship points to an even more subverted patriarchal economy when Mrs Almayer and Nina are read as agents rather than objects of the system. Dain is a symbol of desire (sexual for Nina, political for Mrs Almayer) that moves between them, cementing their bond. In this way, Dain could be thought of as occupying the orthodox role of the exchangeable feminine object in an inversion of the patriarchal economy Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes: 'patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or another form of the traffic in women: it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men' (25-26). Sedgwick's definition of the commodified role of women in patriarchal society, passed physically or metaphorically between men to solidify a connection between them, resonates with Dain's role in *Almayer's Folly*. As 'the ideal Malay chief' of Mrs Almayer's reminiscences and 'the creature of [Nina's] dreams', he is exchanged symbolically as a sign of their shared ideals. As Nina's desire for Dain is an enactment of her half-Malay identity ('"now I am a Malay!"' (AF, 145)), it is an enactment of her identity as a Malay woman's daughter, rather than as a white man's daughter. Consequently, in passing between them as

a symbol of sexual and social promise, Dain becomes a vessel through which Nina's love for her mother can be articulated in the colonial discourse of the text. Nina chooses to be with a man of 'her mother's tradition' in order to forget white faces who 'speak lies', so that this matriarchal economy is also one that subverts racial hierarchies defined by white supremacy.

Despite this weight of textual evidence, Nina's relationship with Dain is still read in relation to patriarchal rather than matriarchal social structures. GoGwilt recognises the extent to which Nina's choice of Dain represents a choice of cultural identity, but he frames this as a rejection of her father's heritage, rather than as an embrace of her mother's: 'There is a strong sense in which Nina's romance with Dain Maroola involves a struggle to forge a national identity and national loyalties stronger than those of her "traditionless father," an Indies-born and distinctly unpatriotic Dutchman' (85). Situating Nina's choice of a life with Dain in relation to her father constitutes another example of GoGwilt failing to prioritise the relationships between women in Conrad's texts.

Jeremy Hawthorn similarly privileges Almayer's role in influencing Nina's choice. In the concluding chapter of his book, *Sexuality and the Erotic in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*, he writes 'Much could be added [in this book] to what has already been written about the triangles of desire linking Dain Maroola, Nina, Taminah in *Almayer's Folly*, and Nostromo, Linda, and Giselle in *Nostromo*. Much too could be said about the involvement of the two father figures – Almayer and Georgio Viola – in these triangles' (2007, 153). While both Hawthorn and GoGwilt are justified in highlighting Almayer's symbolism in Nina's choice (her articulate enunciation of this choice is directed at her father after all), in completely ignoring Mrs Almayer's involvement, they recast Nina's agency in relation to patriarchal roles, rather than matriarchal ones. Nina may be motivated by a will to reject her father, but she is equally if not more drawn to Dain because of her mother's stories; Almayer may be part of the erotic economy of *Almayer's Folly*, but so too is his wife. In failing to acknowledge Mrs Almayer here, both Hawthorn and GoGwilt demonstrate the way female characters of colour are casually written out of Conrad scholarship. There is ample textual evidence to support a reading of Nina's relationship with Dain as a celebration, enunciation and embrace of the Malay heritage her mother has shared with her. Choosing then to frame Nina's choice in relation to her father effaces both Nina and her mother as agents of their own making from the Conrad canon.

Nina and Taminah

When Hawthorn writes of the triangle of desire between Nina, Dain and Taminah, he evokes a recurrent trope of the way Taminah materializes in Conrad scholarship. Her apparent desire for Dain is always framed in relation to Nina. Dryden encapsulates this when she describes Taminah as 'the jealous "other woman"', a constituent part in the 'formulaic' romance between Dain and Nina (2000, 67). In criticism, Taminah's desire for Dain seems inseparable from Nina's desire for Dain, as Hampson demonstrates when he writes 'like Nina, she falls in love

with Dain' (2009, 54). Just as Taminah's desire is regularly mediated through Nina's, Nina and Dain's relationship is frequently figured as triangulated because of Taminah's presence, as GoGwilt typifies:

> What gives Nina's romance with Dain Maroola more than the operatic stage effects with which it is conveyed towards the end of the novel is the manner in which the novel ties that romance to the political state of Sambir. The narrative achieves this, in part, through the role of the slave-girl Taminah, whose desire for Dain Maroola makes her Nina's unpredictable antagonist. (84)

The articulation of female sexuality, from a biracial woman for a Malay prince, is valued by GoGwilt, yet again, because of what it tells us about the politics of Sambir. This means that, according to GoGwilt, Nina as a character with desires and agency is not worth the attention of Conrad scholarship. More significant here, is the way GoGwilt argues her romance with Dain becomes political through Taminah. There is a suggestion, then, in GoGwilt's writing that Nina's desires find meaning in relation to Taminah.

Rather than exploring this implication, however, GoGwilt inhibits reading any relationship between these women, in exactly the same way that he constrains reading a relationship between Edith and Immada in *The Rescue*: 'If Nina's mother embodies the most inclusive sense of Malay resistance to European colonialism, the antagonistic *doubling* of Nina and Taminah registers a problematic priority of racial or national identification' (emphasis added, 84). While GoGwilt's insistence that Mrs Almayer is an anti-colonial hero, and the fact that he refers to her as 'Nina's mother' rather than by the patriarchal-colonial name 'Mrs Almayer,' go some way to prioritising the female characters of colour in this text, his contention that Nina and Taminah are doubles works to diminish their weight within the Conrad canon. Just as when he argues Edith and Immada are doubles, in reducing Nina and Taminah's relationship to one of 'antagonistic doubling', GoGwilt tells us these characters do not matter. As doubles, they become 'halves' of the same symbolic entity. The complexity of two substantial women of colour in a Conrad novel shrinks to the more manageable, familiar prospect of the 'Conradian' pivot; two bodies made to signify only one, single, figured 'woman'. Most significantly, just as he does in his reading of *The Rescue*, GoGwilt tells us that the relationship *between* these female characters is not worth academic attention – that, too, is of no matter. This is how women of colour are written out of cultural history.

GoGwilt's contentions are damaging because they create a critical precedent that makes it easier to ignore these women as characters who interact with each other. Seventeen years after GoGwilt's book, Hannis wrote in 2012, 'Taminah can be read, as Christopher GoGwilt suggests, as Nina's double' (100). She uses this paradigm to argue that 'in this sense, then, Nina and Taminah embody through their juxtaposition, the civilized binary' (100). And just like that, Nina and Taminah become two sides of the same figurative point. In talking about their 'embodiment' as a way of describing them as colonially inscribed marks of racial stereotype, Hannis is careless with their character-status; their materiality suddenly dwindles

as they appear to us now as representatives who are embodied only as contracted forms of the same concept. In the way Hannis writes about them, using a lexicon she borrows from GoGwilt, Nina and Taminah do not take up space as *characters*.

Here too, though, there are lexical slips in Hannis and GoGwilt's language that when pieced together, provide an accidental vocabulary for what happens between Nina and Taminah in *Almayer's Folly*. Unintentionally, GoGwilt delivers the first clue, when he writes that Taminah's 'desire for Dain Maroola *makes her Nina's* unpredictable antagonist' (emphasis added, 84). In the compulsory heterosexuality of the text itself and the criticism that has followed it, Taminah's desire can only manifest with Dain as its object, but, as I will argue, it belongs with Nina; thus we could say that her desire for Dain (or what looks like her desire for Dain) does indeed *make her Nina's*. The second clue, and just as telling, is Hannis' suggestion that 'Taminah's intense attachment to Dain is formed in response to an experience of being seen, when Dain addresses her in a moment of kindness' (103). As I will argue, this points just as readily to Nina as the object of Taminah's desire, because before Dain's kindness, there is Nina's; before Taminah has the 'experience of being seen' by Dain, she is recognised again and again by Nina, in a world where she has always been unseen.

Similarly, where GoGwilt sees rivalry between Nina and Taminah, we could choose to see intimacy: 'Taminah is first identified in the novel not by name, but as "a Siamese girl, a slave," a description that marks a double difference of social status from Nina: from the most subordinate class, she is nonetheless distinguished by her national identity. This is notably what Nina lacks – is denied, indeed, by the "contempt" she receives for her "mixed blood"' (85). GoGwilt positions them in competition when he argues that Taminah has what Nina wants, but perhaps this lack is what brings them together; both young women suffer persecution – for Nina it is based on her race, for Taminah, her social status. We could just as easily choose to read their differences as markers of affinity, rather than division. Indeed, the passage to which GoGwilt refers when he describes Taminah's first appearance in the novel makes it very clear that they are close.

Taminah is first introduced as the narrative follows Nina as she makes her way through Sambir:

> The elder children clustered round her [Nina], daring from long acquaintance, pulling the skirts of her white robe with their dark fingers, and showing their brilliant teeth in expectation of a shower of glass beads. She greeted them with a quiet smile, but always had a few friendly words for a Siamese girl, a slave owned by Bulangi, whose numerous wives were said to be of a violent temper. Well-founded rumour said also that the domestic squabbles of that industrious cultivator ended generally in a combined assault of all his wives upon the Siamese slave. The girl herself never complained – perhaps from dictates of prudence, but more likely through the strange, resigned apathy of half-savage womankind. From early morning she was to be seen on the paths amongst the houses – by the riverside or on the jetties, the tray of pastry, it was her mission to sell, skilfully balanced on her head. During the great heat of the day

> she usually sought refuge in Almayer's campong, often finding shelter in a shady corner of the verandah, where she squatted with her tray before her, when invited by Nina. For 'Mem Putih' she had always a smile, but the presence of Mrs Almayer, the very sound of her shrill voice, was the signal for a hurried departure.
>
> To this girl Nina often spoke; the other inhabitants of Sambir seldom or never heard the sound of her voice. (AF, 33-34)

Taminah's identity is cloaked by the colonial inflections of the narrative voice at this point in the text, as she travels under the subordinate signs of 'slave' or 'girl'. This voice attributes her hopelessness to the 'resigned apathy of half-savage womankind,' casually reiterates Nina's troubling symbolism (casting her as the aloof, Conradian, figured pivot – replete with white robe), and brands Mrs Almayer as 'shrill'. There is a suggestion in this colonial lexicon that Taminah's contact with Nina is defined by social stratification and racial difference, in Taminah's use of 'Mem Putih' (white mistress) to refer to Nina, but, crucially it is the narrator that calls her this.

Beneath this narratorial colonial register, there is a suggestion of an intimate connection between these young women as Nina offers Taminah a moment of peace from her daily routine of assault, fear and brutality. The space of Nina's shady verandah becomes one of shelter from the domestic violence and degradation with which Taminah lives. Nina does not treat Taminah as a slave; instead she confides in her, sharing smiles and friendly words with her, and her alone: 'To this girl Nina often spoke; the other inhabitants of Sambir seldom or never heard the sound of her voice.' Their lives are both defined by isolation, so it is natural that they would turn to each other with kindness. Nina's voice, which speaks of her desires and decisions so lyrically elsewhere in the novel, providing a breathing space in the colonial archive, represents a similar relief for Taminah, so that we can say Nina's voice is a breathing space for Taminah too.

Despite this manifest intimacy between Nina and Taminah, their relationship is memorialized in Conrad scholarship in terms of a jealous rivalry for Dain's affections, as I have argued. The first time the idea of Taminah's desire for Dain enters the text is through the perspective of Babalatchi, when he spies Nina and Dain together in a canoe, with Taminah following close behind them: 'She also had seen them in the grey dawn. And Babalatchi grinned confidentially to himself at the recollection of the slave-girl's discomposed face, of the hard look in her eyes, of the tremble in her voice, when answering his questions. That little Taminah evidently admired Dain Maroola' (AF, 53). Babalatchi reads Taminah's 'discomposed face', hard eyes and trembling voice as evidence of her desire for Dain, but Babalatchi is repeatedly demonized in the text as observant but notably untrustworthy; he is 'scoundrelly Babalatchi' (AF, 62), 'the very picture of watchful ugliness' (AF, 50). Questioning Babalatchi's assumptions, and keeping in mind Taminah's established relationship with Nina, her agitated demeanour is more easily explained by desire for Nina and envy, not lust, towards Dain.

When she informs Almayer of Nina's plan to leave with Dain, at the end of the novel, the feelings she confesses are vague and ambiguously unattached to the normative opposite

heterosexual object: ‘In a rush of words which broke out after a short struggle from her trembling lips she told him the tale of Nina’s love and her own jealousy’ (AF, 131). It is not her own desire for Dain that she speaks here, nor even Nina’s desire for Dain; ‘the tale of Nina’s love and her own jealousy’, could refer to what Taminah felt as Nina’s love for her, and her own consequent jealousy when it is redirected elsewhere. Furthermore, her motivation for notifying Almayer in the first place speaks more to a desire to be with Nina, than jealousy towards her; ‘she spoke the last words of her story crouching at his feet with tears of pain and shame and anger’ (AF, 132), a disproportionate display of regret that reads more like she is betraying someone she cares about, than trying to destroy her enemy. Taminah frames this confession as vengeance, but there is an urgency to her outburst that points to something else: ‘Was her revenge to fail her? This white man was like a senseless stone. Too late! Too late!’ (AF, 132). She appears desperate for Almayer to heed her words and reach Nina before she leaves with Dain. The whole sequence makes most sense when read as Taminah’s last ditch effort to prevent Nina from leaving Sambir (from leaving her) with Dain, as she appeals to the only person with enough social, gendered and racial power to stop her, at great risk to herself.

Taminah’s supposed desire for Dain repeatedly manifests as passionate jealousy of Nina, which begins almost immediately after her first contact with him:

> She rose in terror to run on shore, when he called her back; and as she stood trembling with head hung down before him, he spoke kind words, lifting her chin with his hand and looking into her eyes with a smile. ‘Do not be afraid,’ he said. He never spoke to her any more. Somebody called out from the river bank; he turned away and forgot her existence. Taminah saw Almayer standing on the shore with Nina on his arm. She heard Nina’s voice calling out gaily, and saw Dain’s face brighten with joy as he leaped on shore. She hated the sound of that voice ever since. (AF, 94)

For Taminah, the two narrative events of Dain’s kind words towards her and his face brightening at Nina’s voice are inseparable. It is not attraction for Dain that surfaces in Taminah’s first exchange with him, but a deep hatred for Nina’s voice. Ostensibly, Taminah hates Nina because she is the cause of Dain ‘turn[ing] away and forg[etting] her existence,’ but it is significant that it is Nina’s voice specifically that becomes the object of Taminah’s fury; the voice that was for her alone, the voice that now calls out gaily to someone else who responds with joy.

As Ahmed reminds us, love and hate are not so far apart:

> To consider hatred as a form of intimacy is to show how hatred is ambivalent; it is an investment in an object (of hate) whereby the object becomes part of the life of the subject even though (or perhaps because) its threat is perceived as coming from outside. Hate then cannot be opposed to love. In other words, the subject becomes attached to the other through hatred, as an attachment that returns the subject to itself. (2014a, 50)

Hate, in Ahmed’s writing, is a way for an object to be associated with a body, so in some contexts it could be thought of as a type of contact between bodies. As a feeling that subsumes

the Othered (hated) object into the (hating) subject's orbit, it is a feeling that organizes, engenders and allows proximity, while a narrative of distance and disgust may be maintained. In the context of Taminah's hatred for Nina's voice, hate allows Taminah to feel strongly towards Nina in a way that does not disrupt her normative identity as a subject animated by heterosexual desire. In the confines of the heteronormative romance structure of the plot, Taminah cannot be 'brighten[ed] by joy' at the sound of Nina's voice, like Dain, but she is touched by it nevertheless; the only touch between women that can be measured in this story, and in the scholarship that has followed it, must be one of pain.

Ultimately, Taminah is always most animated by her obsession with Nina, rather than any feelings for Dain:

> Her jealousy and rage culminated into a paroxysm of physical pain that left her lying panting on the river bank, in the dumb agony of a wounded animal. But she went on moving patiently in the enchanted circle of slavery, going through her task day after day with all the pathos of the grief she could not express, even to herself, locked within her breast. She shrank from Nina as she would have shrunk from the sharp blade of a knife cutting into her flesh, but she kept on visiting the brig to feed her dumb, ignorant soul on her own despair. She saw Dain many times. He never spoke, he never looked. Could his eyes see only one woman's image? Could his ears hear only one woman's voice? He never noticed her; not once. (AF, 95)

It is those ambiguous, sticky feelings of jealousy (that are never quite attributed to the appropriate body), rather than those of desire, that have Taminah writhing in 'a paroxysm of physical pain [. . .] in the dumb agony of a wounded animal.' What is supposed to look like desire for Dain takes the shape of a question of Nina's singular appeal, whose presence she feels as violent penetration, 'the sharp blade of a knife cutting into her flesh'. Conversely, we are not told how Taminah feels about being near Dain, only that he is indifferent to her, something else that makes her think of Nina. While Taminah's despair at Dain's focus on Nina implies a heteronormative narrative, in which she despairs because he is not focused on her instead, she is not asking here why Dain does not look at her specifically, but why he cannot look away from Nina. Nina is always at the centre of Taminah's thoughts; she is consumed by her desirability. Moreover, given this emphasis on Nina's voice, the questions also read as Taminah's despair that Dain cannot find someone else to gaze upon or listen to: couldn't he listen to another woman's voice? Taminah misses having this one all to herself.

Taminah's repeated 'why Nina?' questions allow her to assume Dain's position, to perform the normative, expected heterosexual role as someone who is allowed to gaze at Nina erotically:

> She felt a strong desire to see Nina, but without any clear object. She hated her, and feared her and she felt an irresistible impulse pushing her towards Almayer's house to see the white woman's face, to look close at those eyes, to hear again that voice, for the sound of which Dain was ready to risk his liberty, his life even. She had seen her many times; she had heard her voice daily for many months past. What was there in her? What was there in that being to make a man

> speak as Dain had spoken, to make him blind to all other faces, deaf to all other voices? (AF, 96-97)

Again, Taminah classifies her feelings for Nina as hatred in order to qualify the 'irresistible impulse' that pushes her towards Nina as the object of her 'strong desire.' Hatred organises her compulsion to be close to Nina, meaning that the heteronormative narrative may be upheld, and Nina cannot be confused for the object of Taminah's infatuation, despite her longing to be near her. Utilising the racial categories that stratify them in the dehumanised, fragmenting title 'the white woman's face' also helps keep 'Nina' (whose friendly voice is a breathing space) at bay.

However, the intimacy she feels towards her also emerges through her hatred as she asks how Dain's contact with Nina can be different from her own experiences of gazing at and listening to her. This comparison works to conflate these moments of touching; Taminah does not ask 'what was there in her that is not in me?', but 'what does Dain see?'; or 'what does a man get to see?'; or 'how can I speak to her as Dain has spoken?'. Taminah's pull towards Nina cannot be fixed appropriately; her drifting, maddening, inexplicable desire to see her is 'without any clear object.' Yet, by continually picturing what Dain sees in Nina, she manoeuvres herself into a space in which it would be explicable 'to hear again that voice'. She appropriates the male gaze to look on Nina as an object of desire. Thus, when Hannis argues 'Taminah expresses an Othello-like demand for ocular proof of Nina's singular appeal' because she is 'consumed by her own desire for Dain' (93-94), I would argue the desire by which she is consumed is not, in fact, for Dain at all.

When Dain and Nina plan their escape, the intense passion of Taminah, overhearing them, surfaces as a compulsion for contact with Nina: 'She wanted to cry out; to rush at them and tear their vague shadows apart; to throw Nina into the smooth water, *cling to her close*, hold her to the bottom where that man could not find her' (emphasis added, AF, 96). Taminah wants to tear Nina and Dain apart, so that she can 'cling to [Nina] close,' keeping her from Dain, keeping her to herself. Just as the palpable eroticism of 'the grip of an intimate contact' between Edith and Immada is transmuted or ignored in Conrad scholarship, Taminah's desire to cling to Nina close is de-eroticised by Hannis: 'This is a passionate eruption of violence that mirrors the implicitly Hobbesian description of the jungle vines that scramble against each other [. . .] Like the parasitic vines or palms, Taminah is conveyed as a primordial force of nature, unconsciously seeking life and fleeing death, compelled to destroy in order to survive' (101). Hannis reads Taminah's desire to cling to Nina close, to keep her for herself away from Dain, as a symptom of her 'Orientalist' symbolism; what motivates the pull Taminah feels towards Nina, according to Hannis, is the desire to destroy her. Yet in comparing Taminah's urge to cling to Nina to jungle vines, Hannis interprets her yearning in terms of an overtly sexual metaphor; had Taminah been desperate to entwine herself with Dain, or any male character, like a jungle vine, Hannis would surely read that desire as erotic. That even an explicit longing from one female character to cling close to the body of another female

character cannot register as same-sex desire between women in Conrad scholarship suggests there is no space for queer female bodies in this critical sphere. That the relationship between Nina and Taminah is defined only in terms of their 'rivalry' in Conrad criticism, when it materializes as an object worthy of academic attention at all, suggests that there is not even space for female bodies to interact without men in this critical sphere.

In exploring the interactions between Nina and her mother and Taminah in this chapter, in insisting they be served as fully-formed, insightful, multi-dimensional characters, I have been working to provide a way of reading Conrad that disrupts the cultural hegemony of white male experiences, even in the writing of a dead white man. These female characters of colour are powerful, desiring protagonists who own the plot and speak with passion and grace. It is about time they find their place in Conrad scholarship that for too long has focused its attention on 'a Kurtz, a Jim or a Heyst'.

Chapter 6: 'Full-Bodied': Resonance, Embodiment and Nina's Materialisation in Chantal Akerman's *La Folie Almayer*

Throughout this thesis, I have been looking at the spaces in the Conrad canon that allow female characters of colour room to breathe. In this final chapter, I turn to the most recent incarnation, focusing on the materialisation of Nina Almayer in Chantal Akerman's *La Folie Almayer* (2011). In her last narrative film, Akerman adapts Conrad's first novel to stage Nina's experience of epistemic colonial violence and racial prejudice at the centre of her film. After considering the apparatus adaptation studies can provide, I will contextualise the film in relation to Akerman's oeuvre, before bringing it to bear on that of Conrad, by exploring the contractions, expansions and formal transpositions that produce afterlives for *Almayer's Folly*'s female characters.

Adaptation Studies

When I interviewed Aurora Marion, who plays Nina in *La Folie Almayer*, she explained how she had conceived of Akerman's adaptation: 'I used to say that it is Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* recipe with all his own ingredients but the sauce was Akerman's. A sauce that changes the taste of a dish' (Appendix, 176). Marion's metaphor furnishes a productive terminology with which to think of this adaptation and adaptations in general; Akerman takes the components of Conrad's novel, performing and parodying his rubric, and from these constituent parts she makes something that *tastes* new, that is anticipated to produce a different effect in the audience.

In her reading of Akerman's *La Folie Almayer*, Marion Schmid similarly offers a language with which to conceive of the relationship between Conrad's source and Akerman's sauce, writing '*Under Akerman's camera*, Conrad's 1895 novel takes on the wider traits of an existential tragedy where personal and racial conflicts are played out in an avant-garde film language that, in turn, refuses to be colonised by the mainstream' (emphasis added, 2014, 23). Schmid also writes of 'Akerman's *re-reading* of Conrad' which she argues 'de-centres and creolises the source text' (emphasis added, 2014, 34). I will return to Schmid's persuasive reading of the racial and colonial politics of *La Folie Almayer* and her productive focus on Akerman's 'film language', but first I am interested in the way Schmid conceptualizes the interaction between Akerman and Conrad: Conrad under the lens of Akerman's camera; Akerman's camera as a tool for reading Conrad. Schmid offers a vocabulary here, like Aurora Marion, that helps us to describe the kind of contact at stake in the field of adaptation.

Where Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan speak of 'the textual transactions that occur in the process' (1) when introducing the subject of adaptation, Julie Sanders contends 'All adapters are translators [. . .] and all translators are creative writers of a sort' (9). Already,

we are building a lexicon for adaptation that figures it as the transformation of an old dish cooked by a new chef, a type of reading, a type of filming, a transaction and a translation. The proliferation of adaptation metaphors attests to the contradictory, diffuse, malleable conceptions of the adaptation process.

If like Sanders, we think of adaptation as translation, we can conceptualise the power dynamics that might be at play in the process. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi highlight the cultural hierarchies translation enacts:

> translation does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum; it is not an isolated act, it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer. Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems. (2)

The process of translation, Bassnett and Trivedi remind us, establishes and is established by the interrelations of power between cultures that privilege certain discourses over others. I am wary of the subjectivity of translation that Bassnett and Trivedi highlight, of hierarchies that lie beneath its claims to neutrality, when I consider how much my own encounter with *La Folie Almayer* (a translation of *Almayer's Folly*, if we agree with Sanders that 'adapters are translators') has been mediated through another layer of translation. The dialogue of the film is spoken in French, Khmer and English; I speak neither French nor Khmer, and so my contact with the film is through its translated English subtitles.

Tessa Dwyer, in her work on subtitles and dubbing, argues that 'Operating in tandem with other factors affecting distribution, translation plays a major role in determining what films or programmes are seen, where and when, and how they are framed and understood' (2). Dwyer highlights this neglected dimension of media consumption, contending that 'Screen Studies tends to consider language in metaphoric rather than literal terms, with theories of film grammar and film semiotics affording little space for thinking about actual language politics and pragmatics' (3). Thinking of the language of the film 'pragmatically', as Dwyer advises, I am reminded that I am studying a version of this film that has been modified and manipulated for me; my most basic understanding of it is as part of a particularly 'adapted' audience. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin suggest when they write of 'the double logic of remediation', which 'oscillate[s] between immediacy and hypermediacy' (19), to experience the new medium Akerman's film represents (media that defines itself in terms of its newness, its immediacy) I must also necessarily experience media multiplied (hypermediacy), as I rely on another layer of mediation (the film's subtitles) to consume it.

The stratification of value that takes place in translation, of which Bassnett and Trivedi write, chimes with Mieke Bal's concern about the word 'adaptation', which she argues 'is fraught with normative assumptions' (179). Bal proposes thinking of the adaptation process in terms of what she terms 'intership' instead, because 'That noun brings together all activities

qualified with the preposition *inter*-, from interdisciplinary to intertextual, international, intermedial, intercultural, to interdiscursive. *Inter*- means between. It denotes a willingness to exchange on an equal basis' (179). Rather than the value judgements evoked by 'adaptation' – which signifies what I am enjoying calling the 'sauce text' in relation to an original, authoritative 'source text' – Bal wants a word that denotes experiencing two connected texts together, in tandem, as equals. This is how I approach Akerman's *La Folie Almayer*, ultimately contending that the film deserves to be interpreted, studied and taught as part of the Conrad canon, in a way that recognises his relevance without bowing to his authority, by celebrating the evolutions of his under-read women of colour. *La Folie Almayer* is a remarkable text in its own right, testifying to the genius of another artist entirely (which I will come on to), but when read alongside *Almayer's Folly*, it does something to Conrad's text that 'changes the taste of the dish'.

The binate experience implied in Bal's 'intership' is at the heart of adaptation theory, as Christine Geraghty suggests when she points out that 'screen adaptations have doubleness written into their makeup' (11). The very foundation of adaptation is the connection between two texts, as Linda Hutcheon argues: 'Part of this ongoing dialogue with the past, for that is what adaptation means for audiences, creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced – and knowingly so' (116). Thinking of adaptation as a kind of palimpsest is another useful metaphor that proposes adapting and adapted texts as entwined entities consumed together. Citing Hutcheon's 'double pleasure of the palimpsest,' Sanders posits that the pleasure of adaptation 'exists, and persists, then, in the act of reading in, around, through and on (and on)' (17), deepening the entanglement imagery of adaptation's intertextuality. Sanders and Hutcheon both insist on the pleasure of adaptations as doubled, doubling things that touch the people who encounter them in labyrinthine ways.

Nico Dicecco calls the doubleness of adaptation 'the aura of againness':

> This auratic generation of adaptive materiality stands in contrast with other instances of textual interpretation in general because the formal and contextual pieces must be in place for the audience to understand the present-tense attendance to a cultural object in terms of its againness: its dialectical relationship with a past-tense attendance to a cultural object. (614)

Dicecco argues that adaptation represents a specific type of textual interpretation, because it generates and is constituted by an audience that is aware of the doubleness that connects it to a text that has gone before.

The 'past-tense attendance,' as Dicecco calls it, inherent in adaptation, the evocation of and attendance to a past-text, brings me to one of the most persuasive and productive conceptualizations of adaptation proposed by Sanders in her 'Afterword':

> By choosing the title 'Afterword' I am equally aware of how many appropriations have positioned themselves in relation to precursors via this notion of coming 'after', behind, in the shadows, footprints or in the wake of others. [. . .] To 'go after' something could suggest an active mode of pursuing an original for a purpose. Certainly, the drive

> of many of the appropriations studied here is to 'go after' certain canonical or high profile works and to question their basis or foundation in earlier patriarchal or imperial cultural contexts, and this is an important act of questioning that moves us well beyond an act of simple imitation. (207)

In formulating adaptation as a kind of 'going after,' Sanders plays with the chronological element of adaptation as a palimpsestic evocation of the past (that Hutcheon and Dicecco write about), as well as the subversive political potential of adaptive material. Most significantly, she joins these effects together, weaving them into (or maybe unpacking them from) the same active, pursuant movement. Sanders highlights the intertextual acting, the cultural doing, moving, breaking that adaptation represents.

Elaborating on this 'going after' of adaptation, she writes of it first in terms of accumulation: 'Coming after can mean benefiting from accrued wisdom or experience; it can mean finding new angles and new points of entry into the supposedly familiar' (208). Adaptations sometimes 'go after' source texts when they animate forgotten, inert textual bodies. Other examples of 'going after', as Sanders goes on to contend, effect an artistic process that is much more disruptive to the source:

> it is equally important to note that the impact does not only occur in one direction. No appropriation can be achieved without altering in some way the text which inspired that adaptation. [. . .] Few readers who know Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* can now approach *Jane Eyre* without the filter of feminism and postcolonialism and without actively seeking out 'the madwoman in the attic' in that text. (209)

Sanders' example of the reciprocal relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* where the reworking that the latter represents has been indelibly marked on the former, suggests that 'going after' also involves a coming back, whereby new resonances are returned to the source text, changing its taste.

Sanders writes eloquently of the return adaptation can also represent by bringing the respective work of Jacques Derrida and Gillian Beer to bear on the subject of adaptation. She cites Derrida's contention that 'Perhaps the desire to write is the desire to launch things that come back to you as much as possible in as many forms as possible' (Derrida, 158). This is part of Derrida's consideration of the experience of being quoted, or confronted with your work in the hands of others, or your words in the mouths of others:

> All of a sudden someone puts a text right in front of you again, in another context, with an intention that is both somewhat yours and not simply yours. [. . .] What I can say is that it is never the same text, never an echo, that comes back to you. [. . .] What is more, even before someone cites or reads it to you, [. . .] the text's identity has been lost, and it's no longer the same as soon as it takes off, as soon as it has begun, as soon as it's on the page. By the end of the sentence, it's no longer the same sentence that it was at the beginning. Thus, in this sense, there is no echo, or, if there is, it's always distorted. *Perhaps the desire to write is the desire to launch things that come back to you as much as possible in as many forms as possible*. That is, it is the desire to perfect a program or matrix having the greatest potential, variability, undecidability, plurivocality,

> et cetera, so that each time something returns it will be as different as possible. (emphasis added, Derrida, 158)

Derrida sounds like Conrad here, 'one writes only half the book; the other half is with the reader' (LCG, 46); once something is written, it leaves you and will only come back as a different body with a meaning that does not belong to you, a meaning that is never quite what you meant. Derrida, like Conrad, embraces this distorted echo of writing returned, finding pleasure in the different voices that come back to him as the not-quite of his own voice.

It is this pleasure in plurality that Sanders emphasises when she quotes Derrida. She pairs this quotation with Gillian Beer's reading of Charles Darwin. Beer argues that in Darwin's formulation of the natural world, 'the environment is not monolithic and stable: it is itself a matrix of possibilities, the outcome of multiple interactions between organisms and within matter' (Beer, 18). Over and through the palimpsest of Derrida and Beer, Sanders writes 'Adaptation and appropriation, we might add – supplementing, complementing, coming after Derrida and Darwin, as it were – are all about multiple interactions and a matrix of possibilities, about different versions of things. They are, endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many forms as possible' (Sanders, 212). For Sanders, framing adaptation studies in the voices of translation and science, the joy of the subject comes from both the return, 'seeing things come back to us,' and the multiplying mutations that take place in the process.

Adaptation Studies constitutes a relationship between past and present, where the present goes after the past, and the past comes back to the present. That Beer's words become part of the language of adaptation in Sanders' work, means that one description of adaptation offered here is 'multiple interactions between organisms and within matter.' This idea of the material exchange of adaptation is particularly relevant for how I understand the 'afterlives' I write about in this project. We can say that Akerman's adaptation (as well as those illustrative renderings of Greiffenhagen or the pulp cover artists) is also an interaction within matter, or the materialisation of Conrad's female characters of colour returned from their place of marginalisation within the European cultural archive.

Like Sanders, Thomas Leitch's articulation of adaptation theory also involves some borrowing, as he concludes *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* by 'offer[ing] another aphorism by Gide, which offers both an amusingly reductive way to think about theory and a deeply provocative way to think about theorizing and adapting: "*Toutes choses sont dites déjà; mais comme personne n'écoute, il faut toujours recommencer"* [. . .] Everything has already been said; but since no one was listening, everything must be said again' (emphasis original, 707-708). Thinking of adaptation as 'saying again because no one was listening', Leitch, like Sanders, emphasises the repetition, return and reiteration of not only adaptive art but the conversation that surrounds it. It is striking that both Sanders and Leitch look to the words of others to piece together their own framework, or rather it is striking that their conclusions are

so entwined with the words of others, spoken in a patchwork language borrowed from and built on other texts.

The patchwork quality of my own writing here also speaks to the 'variability, undecidability, plurivocality' (Derrida, 158) attendant on writing about adaptation theory. To fulfil my desire to write (as Derrida might put it), I am writing about Akerman's 'writing' on Conrad. In order to do this confidently, in order to produce good writing, I am writing about Sanders' writing and Leitch's writing. For Sanders to produce good writing about her subject, in turn, she is writing about Derrida (who is writing about writing) and Beer (who is writing about Darwin). For Leitch to write about the writings of people who write about rewritings (adaptation scholars), he has to 'say again' the words of André Gide (because no one was listening). I sample, repeat, remix and adapt the words of Conrad, Akerman, Sanders, Derrida, Beer, Darwin, Leitch and Gide, among others, because I am coming after them, and in this way, they are coming back to me.

When we think of it like this, literary criticism is always a kind of adaptation. Mary Snyder describes 'literary criticism as a text built upon other texts', to argue 'scholars and screenwriters perform similar tasks' (105). For Snyder, Hutcheon's work on the different versions of the character of Carmen in various adaptations exemplifies 'the way in which adaptation criticism creates new texts built on other texts' (105): 'Developing her analysis of Carmen from the work of others, Hutcheon produces an adaptation as well. What Hutcheon has to say about the adaptations of Carmen helps to create those adaptations by rethinking them, and she produces an adaptation in the form of criticism formed from the work of others to establish her own work' (105-106). Snyder argues that when Hutcheon stages these different Carmens in her work she is adapting them anew and producing an adaptation in the way she is staging them. The model Snyder proposes here (through her analysis of Hutcheon's analyses – another patchwork/palimpsest), of cultural criticism as the building of texts on other texts to reproduce and restage certain bodies, is particularly relevant for my project as I will it to become a breathing space and afterlife for these characters in and of itself.

If literary criticism can be thought of as adaptation, adaptation can equally be conceived as literary criticism, as Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins argue when they write '"adaptations" may be understood as "readings," paths the filmmakers take through source text(s) that themselves are paths through other texts' (18). As Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins figure adaptation as a kind of pathfinding performed by adaptors through the 'source text', we see a familiar unease with the word 'adaptation', as well as 'readings', which have to be tagged as unstable terms by quotation marks. They elaborate on their 'notion of different paths through a text', describing it as 'another way of saying that adaptations are always interpretations – and interpretations are always adaptations. The story, so to speak, is never separate from the telling' (18). Both interpretation and adaptation involve the process of mapping a text, according to Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, and always necessitate the

creation of a new map: ‘Any “retelling” of a story is a new story because the text has been interpreted by the “reteller”’ (18). No matter the recipe, nor the ingredients used, when cooked by someone new, the dish tastes different. But how can literary criticism handle the role of this ‘reteller’, when one of its central tenets is an ability to transcend the authority of the ‘teller’?

Sanders explores the balance between the demands of literary criticism, in which the decision to ignore the intentions of the ‘teller’ can be more productive and generative, versus those of adaptation studies, in which it may be more fruitful to acknowledge the choices of the ‘reteller,’ which are also arguably harder to ignore:

> what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer’s, director’s or performer’s decision to reinterpret a source text. In this respect, in any study of adaptation and appropriation the creative import of the author cannot be as easily dismissed as Roland Barthes’s or Michel Foucault’s influential theories of the ‘death of the author’ might suggest. Nevertheless the ability of these theories to destabilize the authority of the so-called original text does enable multiple and sometimes conflicting productions of meaning [. . .] (3-4)

Sanders describes the ‘creative import of the author’ of an adaptation as ‘inescapable’, because their political or ethical compunctions can brand their text very explicitly. She argues that this means that the ‘death of the author’ precept of literary criticism (the principle that allows me to write this thesis, given Conrad probably did not intend to populate his work with lesbians – How’s Conrad? Still dead) cannot be so easily transferred to adaptation studies, because the work of adaptors insists on recognition. However, ‘death of the author’ is also a foundational value of adaptation studies, because, at its core, adaptation kills the (original) author, to crown a new one in its place.

Like Sanders, Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins similarly identify the need to acknowledge the particular powers, be they cultural or individual, that bring certain texts into existence: ‘Texts are always inter-texts, and borrow, rework, and adapt each other in complex ways, but at the same time, we can discern specific forces (social, economic, historical, and authorial) at work in particular texts and intertexts – that is to say, in specific “adaptations”’ (19). In a textual culture that is always inadvertently interconnecting, it is still important, Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins insist, to distinguish the deliberate creative exertions that craft certain texts into intertexts. That Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins choose to call these exertions ‘forces’, produces another inadvertent intertext-ing, as it parallels Alisa Lebow’s elegiac description of Akerman: ‘Judging solely by the resoluteness of her images and the decisiveness of her style, she was a *force*’ (emphasis added, 54). Contextualising *La Folie Almayer* in the canon of another artist, Akerman (rather than the canon of Conrad), it will become clear that it is particularly difficult (and reductive) to ignore or dismiss the authorial force that brought *La Folie Almayer* into existence.

Chantal Akerman

Akerman's work is intensely personal in nature, Lebow argues, in a way that defies discourses of critical objectivity for those who choose to study her:

> Akerman's cinema invites a particular type of intimacy, luring spectator and critic alike into a relation that not only feels one-on-one, as if one has been directly addressed, but inclines one to want to embrace and contain her vulnerabilities. While a film theorist is trained to read and interpret the film and not the filmmaker, I believe that even the best-trained and most restrained film theorist can be forgiven for reading authorial intentionality and indeed psychic states into Akerman's work, despite the disciplinary constraints against it. [. . .] Her films speak to the viewer, at least those patient enough to listen, as if in profound and intimate conversation with an old and cherished friend. (56)

Lebow proposes that despite the supposed requirement of neutrality in film theory, it becomes impossible to study the film not the filmmaker when it feels like those films are being made just for you, by someone you feel you know intimately. For Lebow, Akerman's camera contains part of her that reaches through the screen. It strikes me that Lebow's words here resonate with my own thoughts on the digital periodical illustrations and pulp covers I have written about in chapters 2 and 4. It is no surprise that the afterlives of these characters recurrently materialize in particularly affective cultural objects.

If Akerman's oeuvre is distinctly personal, *La Folie Almayer* typifies this, as Schmid attests, arguing that Nina's backstory in the film is 'ultimately more indebted to Akerman's own imaginary – intimately linked to her family history – than to Conrad's novel' (2014, 27). Nina's colonial education is made much more explicit in the film; instead of the Vinck household of the book, she is sent to a boarding school, which, as Schmid highlights (27), is repeatedly figured as her prison. Nina clearly thinks of it in this way, as she tells her father 'my heart is dead. It died in that prison I was locked up in.'[4] Schmid points out the intertextual significance of this line to those acquainted with Akerman's work:

> Spectators familiar with the director's wider *oeuvre* will recognise Nina's utterance as an almost verbatim citation from the musical comedy *Golden Eighties* (1986), where the former GI Eli (John Berry) thus relates the afflictions of the Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivor Jeanne (Delphine Seyrig). The character of Jeanne, like the protagonist of Akerman's most famous film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), is herself modelled after the director's mother, Natalia Akerman, whose internment in Auschwitz constitutes some kind of 'primal scene' that haunts Akerman's *oeuvre* in many guises. (emphasis original, 2014, 27)

In the context of the Akerman canon, the imagery of Nina's imprisonment in *La Folie Almayer* becomes emblematic of an intensely personal family trauma that is a recognisable marker for those viewers looking out for Akerman in her work. Schmid goes on to argue that, beyond this signal to her mother's story, Nina's time in this school is even more closely connected to

[4] Unless stated otherwise, throughout this chapter, I will be quoting from the film's English subtitles, as I am here, rather than the French dialogue.

Akerman's own personal experiences: 'If *La Folie Almayer* palimpsestically inscribes her mother's traumatic experience, it also draws, as the director reveals in an interview with Laure Adler, on her own outsider position as a Jewish child in a Belgian Catholic school in the elaboration of Nina's story: "Tout ce qu'elle [Nina] raconte de ce lycée, c'est de moi qu'elle parle" ["Everything that Nina is talking about when she talks about school is actually me"]' (27-28). Akerman's distinctive voice, history and identity underwrite this film, shaping and infusing the narrative and imagery on screen.

The 'intertwining [of] past and present' (2014, 28) that Schmid identifies in *La Folie Almayer* is something that she positions as characteristic of Akerman's style, in her broader work on the director. Schmid writes of Akerman's 'conception of the cinematic image as a privileged bridge between past and present' (2010, 9). What Barbara McBane calls Akerman's 'sound strategies' (39) play an important role in this bridging of past and present, with McBane arguing 'the songs sung or hummed in Akerman's films [. . .] issue directly from a background of musical traditions in Jewish culture and liturgy, where voice and vocalizing play prominent roles' (42). If Akerman's personal heritage finds space in her work uttered in song and music, the most prominent filmic device through which history and memory are brought into her films, are her famously long takes, as Schmid contends: 'Akerman has always insisted that long takes are necessary to stir the spectator from a state of passivity and to divest the quotidian of its familiarity. [. . .] the long take, in other words, renders visible the invisible and allows the past to inscribe itself in the present' (2010, 112). Through the long take, Akerman forces the viewer to analyse and antagonise the object of the gaze, as well as their own role as gazer.

As Cyril Béghin argues 'the long take records "real time," [. . .] it inscribes and sublimates the banality of an everyday action by respecting its duration, [. . .] it bears witness to a waiting become infinite, one open to various historical dimensions' (48). As Schmid and Béghin explain, history inflects the frame during Akerman's long takes, as the viewer lives through a material moment alongside the characters or objects on screen. This enforced waiting means 'alongside' is perhaps not the right word here, as Béghin stresses: 'In the course of their excessive duration, the long takes fascinate and repel, invite and reject. In equal measure, they solicit continuous attention and assume moments of relaxation, fatigue, abandon' (48). In other words, part of the long take's power, one of the ways in which Akerman employs it most effectively, is the fidgeting it engenders in the viewer, demonstrating that the discomfort of an unbroken perspective can be productive.

As an adaptation that radically 'goes after' its source, *La Folie Almayer* is significantly imbued with this question of the past in the present. This theme manifests through the film's soundtrack and numerous long takes, just as McBane, Béghin and Schmid suggest it does elsewhere in Akerman's work. As I will argue in more detail later in the chapter, these traits of Akerman's film language are a key aspect of Nina's presentation in the film, thus further implicating and centralising her in the version of history the film recounts. If the past imbues

the film's present through sound and long sequence shots, strategies that also constitute Nina's time on screen, she becomes the figure through which the history the film proposes is made present.

Akerman, as Schmid argues, has been 'labelled a feminist and a queer director, an experimental ethnographer and a conceptualist, a hyperrealist and a minimalist, a diasporic film-maker and a great European *auteur*' (emphasis original, 2010, 1-2), but throughout her career she 'consistently rejected attempts to assimilate her into a collective discourse – most importantly feminism' (2010, 11). Karen Hollinger argues that despite Akerman's resistance to the feminist label, her 'works have been singled out as *quintessential* feminist theory films that directly challenge mainstream cinema and attempt to forge a new structure for the cinematic gaze' (emphasis added, 96). Regardless of her own views on feminism, Akerman's films have embodied and have been experienced (and cherished) as feminist cinema for viewers and theorists alike, as Laura Mulvey shows when she writes of watching *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* for the first time at the 1975 Edinburgh Film Festival:

> It was the film's courage that was immediately most striking: on the one hand, Akerman's unwavering and completely luminous adherence to a female perspective (not via the character herself, but embedded in the film itself); on the other, her uncompromising and completely coherent strategy for the making of the film and how it should appear on the screen. [. . .] It felt as though there was a before and after *Jeanne Dielman*, just as there had once been a before and after *Citizen Kane*. (2016, 25)

Mulvey's appreciation for the force and energy with which Akerman brought her film into existence again speaks to the subjective, personal, uplifting connection between Akerman and those who write about her work. Mulvey writes powerfully of *Jeanne Dielman*'s afterlife, of its significance as a cultural marker in feminist history (or perhaps a feminist marker in cultural history), in a way that testifies to the importance of its director to feminist film theory.

What Mulvey identifies in *Jeanne Dielman* as a 'luminous adherence to a female perspective' that transcends the presentation of its characters – the idea that the film as a whole represents a 'feminist thing' (to borrow from Barbara Green) by existing in its own way, on its own terms – is similar to my own feelings regarding *La Folie Almayer*. There are some changes made in the adaptation process, such as Taminah's absence from the film, which do not fit with my own feminist interpretation of the source material. Yet the 'adherence' of which Mulvey writes, means that, for me, there is a difference between Akerman leaving Taminah out of her adaptation of the text, and the illustrators and editors of the periodicals in which 'Freya of the Seven Isles' was published choosing not to illustrate Antonia. Taminah is not another 'invisible lesbian' written out of a Conrad hypertext.

Taminah's Absence

Schmid explores the many changes made by Akerman from source to sauce, from its temporal setting – 'a diffuse twentieth century at the threshold between colonialism and independence,'

in which ‘diegetic music [. . .] sets, costumes and manners loosely point to the 1950s’ – to its location, filmed in Cambodia instead of Borneo but captioned as ‘elsewhere’ at the beginning of the film (2014, 25). Schmid argues that, along with the film’s transnational casting and multilingual dialogue, these changes offer a ‘broader meditation on exile and cultural and racial conflict as well as on the unbridgeable isolation of human beings’ than the source text (2014, 25). Indeed, changes are an inevitable part of the adaptation process, as Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins explain: ‘Adapters cannot “transpose” or transfer a novel, or even another film, to the screen. They must interpret, re-working the precursor text and choosing the various meanings and sensations they find most compelling (or most cost effective), then imagine scenes, characters, plot elements, etc., that match their interpretation’ (16). Under the renovating gaze of someone else (as Derrida suggested), all texts change, contracting and expanding in the places that the gazer wants to make and take space.

In the case of adaptations of Conrad’s work, Gene Moore argues that there is a history of what Gérard Genette calls ‘*pragmatic* transpositions, or modification[s] of the events and actions in the plot’ (emphasis original, 1997b, 294):

> Allégret’s film [*Razumov* adapted from *Under Western Eyes*] relaxes Conrad’s taut time-frame and reduces the plot to the familiar elements of conventional melodrama: Razumov kills the villain [. . .] and dies to save his beloved. Similarly, Alfred Hitchcock’s 1936 adaptation of *The Secret Agent* as *Sabotage* shifts the primary focus of interest away from the relationship between Winnie and her repulsive husband and toward the growing affection between Winnie and ‘Ted,’ a handsome policeman who bears not the slightest resemblance to Conrad’s Chief Inspector Heat. In the end, the Professor blows up all the evidence, and Winnie and Ted accidentally live happily ever after. Heyst and Lena also find happiness at the end of all of the film versions of *Victory*, where the title is emblematic of Heyst’s victory over loneliness and isolation. (5)

Moore argues that ‘these examples illustrate the requirements of a film industry whose products are designed for a mass audience, but they also suggest that Conrad’s novels may be based on romantic stereotypes to an extent that has not been fully appreciated’ (6). The changes Moore lists all ensure putatively proper heteronormative romance plots tie up the discomfort with heterosexuality engendered by the queer ambiguity inherent in Conrad’s writing. According to Moore, they even return Conrad’s texts to heteronormativity by emphasising their reliance on romance tropes.

This is emphatically not the case with Akerman’s adaptation of Conrad. Taminah, the character who I believe troubles the straightforward heterosexual romance in the novel, thus signifying lesbian desire in the text, is absent from Akerman’s film. However, the plot in *La Folie Almayer* is queered in other ways, as heterosexuality is depicted as an almost anti-romantic effect. As Schmid writes, ‘In a radical departure from the novel, where Nina’s love for Dain is enshrined in her marriage, motherhood and ascension to the rank of Balinese princess, the adaptation, in a more cynical take, has her end up, in the director’s own words, as “une danseuse parmi d’autres, peut-être droguée, hallucinée, dans une sorte de bordel” [a dancer

among others, perhaps drugged, hallucinating, in a kind of brothel]' (2014, 26). Schmid goes onto argue that 'Akerman further undermines any notions of romantic love: Nina overtly declares that she does not love Dain (or, at least, "pas encore, pas vraiment" [not yet. Not really]) and only reluctantly elopes with him at her mother's behest' (2014, 30). Romantic love between Nina and Dain is indeed undermined by Nina's seeming lack of interest in Dain throughout the film, and by the film's disturbing, beguiling opening sequence in which the 'blue and cloudless heaven' of the book is a dark, neon-lit nightclub where Nina dances trancelike behind a (badly) crooning Dain.

While this deviation from the source text may cast Akerman's adaptation as 'unfaithful' in certain lights, to me it reflects a loyalty to a particular version of Nina and her story, evoking Snyder's questions, 'Is it necessary for screenwriters to honour their source texts? And who decides whether they're being honoured?' (104). There is a subversive queerness that Akerman reads into Conrad's text that honours Taminah even as she is excluded. Taminah's desire to 'cling to [Nina] close', for example, manifests 'under Akerman's camera,' which remains closely, intensely fixed on Aurora Marion in many of her scenes (Figure 17).

Figure 17 - Akerman's camera performs Taminah's desire to 'cling to [Nina] close' (*La Folie Almayer*, 2011)

Marion's Nina is the centre of the screen, occupying our gaze, as she has occupied Taminah's. The lesbian is not rendered invisible here as she is in the periodical publications of 'Freya of the Seven Isles' (and Conrad scholarship), because Taminah's desires are enacted through a queer screen which, through the feminism of Akerman's film language, elicits, engenders and re-enacts a lesbian gaze towards the object of her obsessions and fantasies. Thus, to return to Snyder, when we think about Taminah's role in this film (or lack thereof), I would argue that despite her absence, it is a queered *Almayer's Folly* that is repeatedly honoured in *La Folie Almayer*. When we turn to Mrs Almayer's materialization in the film, the feminist implications of Akerman's adaptation become even clearer.

Zahira was Raped

Though Schmid argues Mrs Almayer 'is far more developed in the novel despite the fact that she is not given a name' (2014, 30), and though she is given far less screen time than Nina, I would argue there is significant feminist breathing space for her in this film. If nothing else, she is named here: Zahira. This very simple strategy gives her an identity of her own, pointing to a chain of signification in which she is known outside of her patriarchal-colonial commodity roles. This small gesture signals a world in which she moves as someone other than Almayer's unhappy wife and Nina's 'witch-like' mother. By naming her, Akerman draws her a lifeline away from the trajectory determined for her in the novel by her subordinated gender and racial positions.

Secondly, there is a suggestion that Almayer has raped Zahira. In a melancholy scene between Almayer and Lingard, where Almayer talks about his unhappy marriage and describes himself masturbating, or 'screaming alone', Almayer says 'I never felt like a man with her [Zahira]. Except when I forced her so that her eyes would finally express something, any feeling, even pain'. Lingard's disapproving response emphasises the violent connotations of Almayer's language, and the implications of what he describes: 'and what did you think about when you screamed alone? Huh, what, who? And without forcing her like a brute.' Lingard juxtaposes the sexual fantasies Almayer describes with the shameful reality of his actual behaviour, in which he 'forces' his wife sexually, to make her 'express something, any feeling, even pain', 'like a brute.' Establishing Almayer as a rapist means that he is made to bear the shame of his conduct towards Zahira, so that the interracial relationship between them – which Conrad's Almayer repeatedly figures as something that has been forced on him against his will – is portrayed in terms of a history of his abusive and 'brutish' behaviour in the film. In short, there is an insistence in Akerman's film that it is Zahira, not Almayer, who is the victim of this relationship. While Mrs Almayer is given breathing spaces throughout the novel, as Dryden argues (2000, 74) she is only really humanised towards the end of the text when she says goodbye to her daughter for the final time. 'Under Akerman's camera', however, she is named and evoked as a victim of rape within the first twenty minutes of the film. I would argue that before we really spend any time with her, we are already on her side.

Aurora Marion as Nina

While it is possible to discern small but significant changes in *La Folie Almayer* that could constitute the 'female perspective' Mulvey celebrates, the most feminist translation of Conrad's work here is in Akerman's representation of Nina. She materialises at its centre as the sort of resonant body Rita Felski encourages us to endow 'with [. . .] authority,' in order to read female experience as human experience (17).

One of the reasons female bodies can be read resonantly in this film is because of the nature of the medium, as Brian McFarlane suggests:

> Film [. . .] is always *happening* in the present tense. There is no filmic equivalent for words like 'ran' or 'walked': their very inflection signals an act that is complete as it is being described on the page. Film will, instead, show us characters in the act of 'running' or 'walking.' Even when film resorts to flashback to make us aware that the action depicted is meant to be read as happening in the past, there is nothing intrinsic to the image at any given moment to make us think, Ah, this is occurring at some anterior time. Once the filmgoer is transported to this past time, every action in the narrative seems to be happening with the same degree of presentness as the actions pertaining to the sequences set at the later date. (emphasis original, 21)

The storytelling of film manifests through material worlds that appear to us in the present; we are shown something as if it is taking place in front of us, because it *is* taking place in front of us. The present tense of film, that McFarlane describes, suggests a visceral connection to the characters on whom we are gazing that means that, on a very basic level, when Nina materialises on screen, she does so 'now' as if she is here with us. She is made present like Aïssa is made present in the paratexts of the pulps, and like Freya, Antonia, Edith, and Immada are made present through the laptop screen in the digital periodical archive; they appear to us with lives of their own, beyond that of the dead white man who first created them.

Because of the way Akerman's long takes record 'real time', as Béghin has highlighted, the presentness of film that McFarlane explores is particularly relevant when thinking about her cinema. *La Folie Almayer* does not follow a linear narrative strategy, beginning at the end and fragmented throughout with scenes that could feasibly take place at any time after Nina's return to Sambir. Within this fractured composition, Nina's story is arguably the most conventionally structured as it adheres to the timeline of her schooling and subsequent expulsion. I have been thinking of the ten-minute sequence in the middle of the film as Nina's backstory, but McFarlane's words draw attention to the fact that even though these scenes take place in a time that precedes the film's opening sequence, we experience all these scenes in 'real time', living alongside Nina in the present. The very nature of this filmic version of Nina thrives on her materiality as a character.

She comes into being as a crystallization of 'forces', to borrow from Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, or is imbued with resonances from different creative sources, that go beyond Akerman's auteurist stamp. As Schmid reminds us, Akerman's

> work is a collective enterprise, reliant on the input of a set of, mainly regular collaborators. The work of cinematographers Babette Mangolte in the 1970s, Luc Benhamou in the 1980s and Raymond Fromont and Sabine Lancelin (amongst others) in the 1990s and 2000s, of editor Claire Atherton and of co-scriptwriter Eric de Kuyper, has shaped the changing aesthetics of her films and facilitated the crossover between the experimental and the mainstream. (2010, 11)

Fromont and Atherton both worked on *La Folie Almayer*, suggesting that if the film is representative of Akerman's oeuvre, then this is not just because of Akerman. Schmid goes on to argue that, in keeping with this collaborative approach to filmmaking, the working relationships Akerman forged with three generations of French actresses 'allowed her to

create her own filmic genealogy' (12). The distinctions that stratify actresses and questions of auteurism occupy Hollinger's work; she proposes 'that prominent stars can have an influence on their films that should be seen as auteurist' (231). Hollinger argues that auteurism, often considered the purview of wise white male artists (author-Gods), should be ascribed to actresses too. She limits her focus to Hollywood stars with box office clout, but her words are equally applicable for Aurora Marion's performance in *La Folie Almayer*.

Though she is just as responsible for embodying this version of Nina (for making her matter) as Akerman, Aurora Marion has not received the credit she deserves. There is a sexualizing and exoticizing undercurrent to the descriptions of her in reviews of the film which place value on her appearance rather her craft. Nicholas Rapold calls her 'frustratingly stiff' (par. 7) in his neo-colonially titled 'Trapped in a Jungle and a State of Mind' *New York Times* review from 2012. His only praise for Marion is based on her appearance, and even this is framed negatively, as he argues that 'the vibrant beauty of Nina (the new face Aurora Marion) seems almost an affront' (par. 6) in comparison to the bleakness of Almayer's life. Marion's contribution to the film is measured in terms of her desirability, which is in turn categorized as troubling. She is to Rapold the embodiment of what Mulvey famously termed '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (emphasis original, 1975, 11). There is no sense in his review of what Marion is *doing* as Nina, or even of Nina as a role that requires the *doing* of performance.

The language Michael Atkinson employs in his review of the DVD release of *La Folie Almayer* in the December 2016 issue of *Sight and Sound* is even more demeaning to both Marion and the character of Nina. He writes of 'the film's payload of South-East Asia exotica, its superbly crafted old-school melodrama complete with *a ravishing half-blood temptress (Belgian-Greek-Rwandan beauty Aurora Marion)*' (emphasis added, 96). Nina is erased, as is Marion's effort to embody her as a character separate from herself as Atkinson effectively labels Marion 'a ravishing half-blood temptress'. Aside from the inaccuracy of Atkinson's writing, as neither Conrad nor Akerman ever position Nina as anyone's 'temptress', Atkinson's focus on Marion's personal heritage makes his use of 'half-blood' particularly offensive. There is something about the world of Conrad, or 'the bush of Conradistan' (96) as Atkinson calls it, that allows the lexicon of colonialism to creep into public discourse, that makes it socially permissible in December 2016 to describe Aurora Marion as a 'Belgian-Greek-Rwandan beauty', rather than an actor, or to call her 'half-blood' or 'temptress'. Sticky 'Conrad' permits the recirculation of words in colonial ways. When you're talking about Conrad you can say 'half-blood', just as you can apparently say 'coloured' or 'a little bit yellow'. It's OK, because 'Conrad' makes it so. Here again, we see how insidiously a 'Conradian' vocabulary empowers certain bodies to speak while excluding others from cultural production. According to Atkinson, Aurora Marion does not take up space in the film, in the canon of Akerman's work, in the canon of Conrad adaptations, or in 'Conradistan' as a maker of meaning, but as an Other.

In leering tones, he recounts Nina's return to Sambir as an adult as 'fierce, hateful and *full-bodied*' (emphasis added, 96). This reference to the difference between the child actor playing Nina when she is taken from Sambir and Aurora Marion playing her when she returns, suggests (cynically and sinisterly) the ogle-able *full body* of a woman, versus that of a young girl. That Nina's emotional characteristics 'fierce, hateful', denoting Marion's expression of Nina's internal state, are conflated with her 'full body', is a further example of the way her performance is repeatedly read in terms of her appearance and sexual attractiveness. Atkinson's use of 'full-bodied' functions as another political marker keeping Marion outside the scope of cultural production, a reminder that what she expresses as Nina will not be valued under the male gaze as anything more than being present as a permissible erotic object, unlike her junior co-star.

But in another way Marion's 'full-bodied' Nina is exactly what makes the film such a productive feminist adaptation. Nina's presentation in the film *does* 'connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*', but as a resonant body that fills the screen, occupying the attention of the audience and conveying a 'stor[y] of heroic struggle and [. . .] existential metaphors' of pain, despair and isolation, just as Felski has described (17). The way Marion's embodiment of Nina has been marginalised in reviews of the film points to the roles women of colour are allowed to occupy in 'the cultural air we breathe,' and the cultural capital denied to certain bodies as the colonial archive is recirculated.

Marion's testimony of her own connection to the source text reads as a breathing space in its own right from the cultural air the *New York Times* and the *Sight and Sound* reviews espouse. When I asked about her first impressions of the story, Marion recalled that

> It felt so close to me. So close to my mother's story. Her story that I carry in me. Like Akerman carried her mother's experience of the Second World War throughout her life without having lived it personally. [. . .] My mother was one of the first half cast child[ren] that was made out of love and not rape. Her mother is Rwandan and her father was Belgian. She was born in 1949 in central Africa when mixed race couples were forbidden. When she was about to be five years old her parents looked for a school. She wasn't accepted anywhere. Nor in White catholic school nor in schools for black people as she was neither [. . .]. So her parents sent her to Belgium to her father's village where she would be somehow accepted bearing her Belgian father's name, but still neither black or white. She was only five years old when she was sent somewhere far away from anything she knew so far. Like Nina was. Nina is my mother, my mother that carries her own story as she carried me. (Appendix, 176)

Nina's story is plainly as personal for Marion as it was for Akerman, as she articulates the way her own racial identity and family history infused her understanding of the character. The

resonances Marion brings to the character of Nina also highlight the violence behind Atkinson's use of the term 'half-blood'; when we think about the way she describes the role of Nina, her performance comes to represent the condensation of the brutal history of oppression and injustice behind such words.

Figure 18 - Aurora Marion as Nina leaving the Colonial Boarding School (*La Folie Almayer*, 2011)

One of the most striking examples of Marion's performance is a wordless sequence mid-way through the film, at its very centre, that follows Nina as she leaves the boarding school and journeys back to Sambir. We see her exit the school gates, breathe deeply (inhaling a different cultural air to the colonial one that has been smothering her), unclip the tight bun in which her hair is fastened, light a cigarette and begin to walk (Figure 18). She walks with purpose through Phnom Penh at night, past families, market stalls and neon lights, the camera fixed on her in profile as if we walk alongside her. In the daylight she walks towards us through busy traffic, before stealing an apple from a market stall, relieving herself in an alleyway and scoffing a bowl of soup (Figure 19). As Schmid writes of these scenes, 'the anachronistic presence of modern cars and DVD stores [. . .] not only evinces the director's lack of interest in the accuracies that would be demanded by a period-style historical reconstruction, but displaces the film's absolute vantage point into our own present from where Conrad's investigation of colonialism and its discontents will be revisited'

Figure 19 - Nina's journey through Phnom Penh (*La Folie Almayer,* 2011)

(2014, 25). Nina materialises in our own world, populated by real people who barely see her while our gaze 'cling[s] to her close.' When a car drives in front of the camera, obscuring Nina from view because she is not the centre of the world she inhabits, we wait for her, peering round the car until she comes back into view because she *is* the centre of the cinematic world that we are inhabiting. She is present, presented, a presence through Marion's 'full-bodied' performance. Schmid argues that 'Marion's stubbornly determined gaze and her rigid, almost hieratic bodily posture and swift-paced walk tracked by the camera "speak" the young woman's isolation in the pulsating Asian metropolis, where, just as in the white boarding school, she remains an outsider' (2014, 28). In this sequence, Akerman's camera speaks for Nina, speaks *as* Nina as an extension of her embodiment; the materiality of her narrative – eating, smoking, urinating – owns the screen. The lack of dialogue throughout this section and the extended focus on Nina's actions encourage us to imbue her movements with meaning, to find resonance in her body.

The resonance the film presents in Nina's extended silence echoes a significant aspect of the 1970s feminist cinema to which Mulvey argues Akerman was such an influential contributor: 'One particular perspective, or theme, out of the many taken up by feminist cinema during the 1970s is especially salient for *Jeanne Dielman*: the interiority of women's lives, that is, how to find a voice for the inside of the mind itself as well as for its silences' (2016, 26).

In *La Folie Almayer* too, space is provided for Nina's internal voice, so that it is *her* existential thoughts and introspections that occupy the viewer. This silence appoints Nina as exactly the sort of Conradian character that Conrad scholarship has so emphatically insisted is always white and male ('a Kurtz, a Jim, or a Heyst' (Collits, 20)).

The sequence concludes with Captain Tom Li's Cinderella-like discovery of Nina's discarded sandal, before the camera pans across the port to the slumped figure of its owner waiting for passage back to Sambir. She utters her first spoken words in the film, 'they kicked me out', as the culmination of the cultural and social exclusion the previous wordless scenes have enacted. Over the course of her boat journey back to Sambir, Marion delivers the monologue of Nina's traumatic colonial education:

> They spied on me. At the table. In my bed. My accent, my way of walking. Especially my way of walking. You had to put the heel down first, then the toes. Or the contrary. I could never get used to it. They called me Tomboy, even Savage sometimes. Not a real girl. Real girls aren't like that. Smiling, the head slightly tilted. Not straight, never straight. And never ever look into the eyes. And say yes. Not no. And the blood, when it happened, you had to hide it, not to talk about it. But be proud of it. Rosa rosa rosam, it was useless. And yet, I learned, if I'm the best, I'll manage, I told myself. And I was the best, but for that too they resented me. And there was always that beef with carrots. Beef with brown sauce. Sticky. The smell. Made me retch. *De viris Illustribus Urbis Romae*. The wars of Caesar. The Emperor who, in the end, got killed by the man he loved. I had to learn everything by heart. I didn't want to. Neither the beef, nor the salad with vinaigrette, nor the coffee with boiled milk. Rosa rosa rosam. And our Father who is in Heaven. My father was not in Heaven. He no longer existed. The beef with carrots. Every Thursday. Friday fish. That day I always said I wasn't hungry. But I was hungry. I was starving. I had never enough. All the time. And then I stained my dress. Rosa rosa rosam. And our Father who is in Heaven with the broken windows.

This monologue attests to the way Akerman's adaptation invests in the pockets of information in Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* about Nina's whitening experience in Singapore. Continuing the themes of the preceding images, there is a further emphasis here on the materiality of the female body. The 'full-body' in which Nina is returning, the 'filling out' of that body through puberty, is referenced not in the way Atkinson implies, but in terms of her own experiences of her changing body. When she describes menstruation, she is also articulating and critiquing the attendant contradictions of shame, defilement and eroticism that overwrite this 'filling out' body in patriarchal society. Nina's feelings on her own embodiment are staged throughout the scene as she voices the performativity at stake in appearing as 'a real girl,' something that is also inflected with racial discourses, as her 'failure' to be 'a real girl' means she is branded 'Savage'. The life she describes is one in which colonial and patriarchal codes intersect at the point of her oppression, so that her colonial education in the wars of Caesar and the eighteenth century Latin textbook *De viris Illustribus Urbis Romae* takes the form of a rape, as her body is forced to contort in accommodation of alien entities: 'I had to learn everything by heart. I

didn't want to. Neither the beef, nor the salad with vinaigrette, nor the coffee with boiled milk.' In Marion's monotone delivery, the mantra of borrowed European Christian teachings becomes a discordant vocabulary of her story of isolation, and the racial and gendered circumscription of her ambitions and talents. Marion's performance makes it clear that this trauma has damaged Nina, but given that this monologue follows the hypnotic sequence of her animated material exploration of Phnom Penh, to which her renewed smoking is an evident signal (Figure 20), the speech becomes another moment in which the audience is encouraged to find resonance in her body, to piece together a narrative from the broken fragments she offers us.

This sequence in the film provides Nina with more narrative space than any other character, as she recounts the ordeals she has endured at the school in her own voice and provides a relatively straightforward explanation of her trajectory up to this point in the film. That we have already spent considerable time with Nina during the film's mesmeric opening sequence means that these scenes function as the delivery of Nina's backstory, filling in the blanks and working towards answering the questions posed by the mysterious prologue. In this way, Nina is the most accessible route into the narrative, the character with whom the audience is most readily able to identify, as Schmid writes:

Figure 20 - Aurora Marion delivers Nina's monologue to Yucheng Sun as Captain Tom Li on the return journey to Sambir (*La Folie Almayer*, 2011)

> Instead of dwelling on the characters' stories (which, *with the exception of Nina*, are far more developed in the book) or their psychological makeup, she [Akerman] directly homes in on their emotional tensions and conflicts. For spectators unfamiliar with the novel, it is difficult, if not impossible, to piece together any coherent picture of Almayer's background, to grasp the complex, hybridised identity of his wife or to understand the exact nature of Dain's undercover activities. (emphasis added, 2014, 33)

Neither Almayer, nor Dain, nor Lingard, nor Zahira are granted the narrative stake that Nina is afforded. Amidst the ambiguous characterizations that Schmid describes, we are left with Nina, as the most approachable gateway into the complicated narrative. She is the only character whose history is really explored, and thus becomes the primary entrance point for audiences unfamiliar with the source text.

For my purposes, the film's greatest strength is this investment in imagining the events that preceded and defined Nina's adult life in Sambir. Placed in triptych with Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* (the events of which take place during Nina's

early childhood), the film creates a counter-structure to the Lingard trilogy, as it provides an imagined anachronistic backstory for Nina, just as *The Rescue* offers an imagined anachronistic backstory for Lingard. If we can conjecture that the Lingard trilogy is substantiated, organized and even constituted by *The Rescue*, a novel that operates almost as an origin story for Lingard, we could equally nominate *La Folie Almayer* as the cornerstone of an alternative intertextual trilogy that we might choose to name after Nina. In order of publication, the Lingard trilogy begins with *Almayer's Folly* (1895), in which Lingard is largely absent, presumed dead; *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) is a prequel that details events in Sambir ten to fifteen years before *Almayer's Folly*, in which Lingard plays a more substantial role, but is again absent for a large part of the narrative; *The Rescue* (1920), published at a much later date but set in the 1860s, takes Lingard as its central character and explores formative events that shaped his youth (or younger days). When we place Nina at the centre of our focus, and use her trajectory as our organizing principle (rather than that of either Lingard's fictional timeline or Conrad's publication one) we see the pattern of the Lingard trilogy mirrored in *An Outcast of the Islands, Almayer's Folly* and *La Folie Almayer*. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, Nina is an infant and thus just as absent as (but significantly less dead than) Lingard in the first text of *his* trilogy; Nina plays a central role in *Almayer's Folly*, and I would argue works as its main character, despite the novel's title; similarly, I would argue that *La Folie Almayer* is Nina's film, as it works, like *The Rescue* for Lingard, to stage a backstory that positions her as an identifiable point of reference, whose presence endows plot points with substance, relevancy and jeopardy.

Figure 21 - Nina as Lingard (La Folie Almayer, 2011)

Indeed, as Aurora Marion argues 'In another life, Nina could have been another Captain Lingard. And I did work on Nina, having in

mind that Captain Lingard was the male version of her alter ego' (Appendix, 177). During her return to Sambir, the camera lingers with long shots of Nina at the bow of the boat, gazing across the water into night, smoking another cigarette in the twilight and clutching her bag as she stares into the distance (Figure 21). She stands like the resonant white middle-aged male sea-faring 'Conradian' bodies so synonymous with his canon, who stare out at foreign worlds, ruminating over metaphysics, or human nature, or some other plague on middle-aged white men. The difference is that as a body that is neither white nor male nor middle-aged, and a body that is on the receiving end of the moral questions about which Conrad's male heroes are often despairing (like the the violence of imperialism), she actually has something to agonise over. Reading the film as the organizing text of a new trilogy is another opportunity to imagine a Conrad canon that is not structured by dead and dying white men, but populated by animated women of colour with lives of their own and things to say.

It is also gratifying to think of the film in this way, because it means that we have a trilogy for Nina that offers her a happy ending that is not defined by men. *La Folie Almayer* opens with an extended sequence in which we see the man who will later turn out to be Dain lip-syncing to Dean Martin's *Sway*, with a group of dead-eyed young women, including Nina, mechanically dancing behind him in what Schmid calls an indictment of 'a global entertainment industry which relentlessly reproduces the same simulacra' (2014, 30). When Dain is stabbed and everyone but Nina flees the stage, it becomes clear to viewers familiar with the source text that this scene is an imagined future that Akerman has invented for Nina and Dain. Schmid argues that this vision of Nina's destiny 'exceeds by far even the bleakest prophesies for her future in the book' (2014, 30). Nina remains alone on stage for almost a minute, as the camera closes in on her, before she starts singing Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* directly into the camera; she occupies the screen for a further 2 minutes, singing the motet to completion. Over the course of the film, it transpires that she learnt the song at the boarding school; in one scene, we overhear her trying to sing it at the school, but she is repeatedly castigated by her teachers; in Sambir, she cannot sing more than a few words before her voice fades away.

Schmid interprets Nina's recital of the song at the film's opening as an ambivalent performance that 'begs its own set of questions: will she find her own voice and determine her destiny now that she is free from the double influence of both her father and lover? Can the subaltern speak [. . .] and does she have access to agency outside colonial and male-dominated structures of power?' (2014, 26). For Schmid, while Nina's singing may imply the potential for a different future to that of 'a dancer in a seedy nightclub-cum-brothel' (2014, 30), it is still emblematic of colonial and patriarchal lexical regimes that dictate who gets to speak and how.

While Nina's singing is not enough in and of itself to challenge Schmid's interpretation of this prologue as 'the bleakest prophesy' of Nina's future, Aurora Marion and Akerman viewed the singing more positively, as Marion explains: 'I remember Chantal Akerman telling

me that when Dain finally dies, Nina is free. She can sing again' (Appendix, 177). This hopeful interpretation is evident in Marion's performance, as she sings through a beaming smile that we do not see again (Figure 22). Nina's smile casts her recital as a reinscription of her colonial education, where she takes the words and culture of her abusers to find her voice on her own terms, a voice that cannot be interrupted by anyone and one that, opening the film, frames the text as a story that starts with and belongs to her. This retooling is repeated in her monologue about the school later on in the film. By beginning the film with a grim vision that is replaced with the image of Nina's smile, Akerman assures us of Nina's ultimate happiness from the outset. This means that even when her trauma is staged by the camera and script she is not trapped in her victimhood; we know one day she will have reason to smile again. This version of Nina, happy and free, transcends the confines of the main body of the film, floating through and outside her darkest scenes as a reminder of the future that awaits her. Thus, she materializes in this text as a character that exists beyond the scope of Conrad's reach, with an (after)life of her own.

Figure 22 - Nina sings again (La Folie Almayer, 2011)

When Bal writes about her own 'intership' of *Madame Bovary* and her sense of connection to the character of Emma, she encapsulates the idea that a particular image can rise from the pages of a source text to reverberate through the texts that come after it:

> identifying with characters, even unbearably fraught ones, one can share their adventures, emotions, hopes and disappointments, partake of the events, even adopt the words that describe those. Identification does not depend on the merit of the character. At one time, we were able to engage with them; now, in the present, we can recognize the sentiment, relive it, because it is lodged somewhere

> inside us and continues to be overdetermined, layer by layer, by other memories.
>
> In particular, we can *see* Emma and the others: her little daughter, the men in her life. The image, remade every time someone sees it, is in constant transformation and stands outside of standard time. It unfolds in the tempo of those who see it. One tends to underestimate the part that images play, not only in visual art and culture, but in reading, in memory, in any cultural activity. It is through this anachronistic bond and the images it forges that literature's relevance continues. (emphasis original, 185)

Nina's materiality in this film matters; she is made present to its viewers over and over again as a substantial person, 'full-bodied'. She is an image remade, constituting the afterlife of Conrad's text, but this recurrence remakes it too. In *La Folie Almayer*, *Almayer's Folly* is immortalised in the body of a young woman coming to grips with the racial and sexual prejudices that shape her path through the world. The colonial archive is here populated by and remembered in the form of women of colour; thus, those bodies of the dying white male (anti-heroes) we have grown so used to finding there lose their exclusive authority as resonance-bearers and makers of meaning. The archive, instead, comes to account for different stories from different bodies. *La Folie Almayer* is therefore a crucial text for the future of a feminist, postcolonial Conrad canon, and an exemplary model for how the work of dead white men can be retooled to circulate a more inclusive cultural air.

Conclusion: What's the Point?

I conclude this thesis with one last anecdote. During the first year of my PhD, my friend Sarah Stewart and I revived the Intersections and Borderlines Reading Group that had been running before we started. In one of our meetings another student asked me a question to which I have been returning ever since. We were discussing our research projects and I was describing mine as a postcolonial, feminist, queer reading of Conrad, when she asked me how I get over the basic fact that, no matter who he presents in his work, Conrad is always, and will always be, a dead white man.

Suffice to say, I didn't have much of an answer to that. It's been a question I've been avoiding ever since, the one I hope no one will ask when I stand up to present at feminist, queer and postcolonial conferences, the one I hope won't come up in conversation. It's morphed into a question I've been asking myself throughout this project: what is the point of this thesis? Why, if I'm not interested in dead white men, have I gone out of my way to dedicate so much of my energy to memorialising one? Surely, the more feminist project would be to follow female voices in the canon? Surely, if I wanted to look at the representation of women of colour I might've started by looking at representations *by* women of colour? What kind of lesbian turns to Joseph Conrad for validation?

These are questions I still struggle with, but this struggle is necessarily productive; it has kept me focused and held me accountable for my decisions. These anxieties remind me that Conrad is dead, and cannot be touched or harmed, but 'Conrad' and the language that sign produces is still touching, and even harming, people. When Armstrong writes that *Heart of Darkness* is 'part of the cultural air we breathe' he is correct; if interventions such as mine are not made, my sense is that people will always read *Heart of Darkness*, people will always read *Lord Jim*. These texts will continue to be sanctified in the perpetual reissues of Norton Critical editions, they will continue to take up space on the 'classics' bookshelf at Waterstones, they will continue to be listed on University reading lists under the topic of 'Empire'. But literary criticism's 'distinctly Conradian perspective on empire' (Collits, 12) need not always be dominated by the perspectives of white men, because when we look at Conrad's actual output we find other resonant bodies, other narratives hidden beneath the sign of 'Conrad'.

There are breathing spaces within 'the cultural air we breathe', in which women desire women, as I argued in Chapter 1, and in which the woman as 'Other' rewrites the colonial codes that exoticize her, as I wrote in Chapter 3. Choosing to prioritise these smaller pockets of resistance, makes the larger breathing spaces more overt, as I contended in Chapter 5 when I presented *Almayer's Folly* as a text dominated by three women of colour. When we read for them, there comes a point at which these breathing spaces cease to register as anomalies in 'the cultural air we breathe', and appear instead as the 'studiously' (Morrison, 139) forgotten substance behind that cultural air. Before there was *Heart of Darkness*, there

was *Almayer's Folly*; if we're going to keep reading the former, we should start reading the latter, if we don't want 'Conrad' to only ever stand for white male narratives.

These are the points I should have made at the reading group. I should have said that I know Conrad's colonial fiction is not a definitive representation of all women (as 'a practising homosexual' (Ruppel, 2), I can confirm we do more than look at each other on boats), but I refuse to accept the discourse that tells me this fiction cannot represent any women, because it will always belong to men. I *will* see homosexuality where there isn't any, thank you very much, and I *will* call Aïssa a woman of colour, and *of course* there are women in Conrad, because (fun fact) women are everywhere!

Literary criticism distributes cultural capital, by shaping the discourses that circulate beneath the sign of the author. In this thesis, I have worked to draw attention to the lexicon associated with the 'Conradian' and hold it accountable by today's social standards. But I have also tried to offer a different 'Conradian' lexicon, one that is not based on 'The Horror! The Horror!' (HD, 69), but 'the grip of an intimate contact' (R, 122), and 'the brook will not care' (OI, 208) and 'Ah! but it was not my way!' (AF, 154). I offer this account of Conrad's works to show that other bodies, bodies of Others, do take up space in his writing, and in an attempt to ensure that they are allowed to take up space in the writing about his writing.

Asking myself 'what's the point', brought me to the realisation that I had to shift my focus away from a 'how's Conrad?' perspective – how will this affect Conrad's reputation? Is this representative of what Conrad would think? – to a 'still dead' perspective. From here, I decided to think more about this taking-up-of-space business, and to follow these 'Othered' bodies, as they move through his work and beyond his reach. I have imagined afterlives for his female characters in this thesis by tracing their recurrence in material forms. In the digital periodical archive, on covers of pulp paperbacks and on screen, the space Freya, Antonia, Edith, Immada, Aïssa, Nina, Taminah and Mrs Almayer take up is negotiated and renegotiated, as their status as characters is staged (or not) in these visual contexts. Seeing them like this reminds me that, as much as they belong to the period in which they were conceived, they matter here too.

In Chapter 2, I briefly considered the way Margaret Beetham and James Mussell respectively argue that 'periodical time' is the paradox of the 'now' conflated with the 'then', (as each new, unique issue of the periodical defines itself against, while existing because and as part of the series of issues that have come before). In Chapter 4, I invoked Rabinowitz's writing on pulp paperbacks, 'one keeps them' because they take 'up shelf space, and accumulate weight' (29), so that the pulp, which was 'trash' in its own time, exists in ours as an object of value. In Chapter 6, when I discussed McFarlane's description of film as 'always *happening* in the present tense' (emphasis original, 21), even when the story on screen reflects past tense, I was thinking about these other arguments about temporality. 'Periodical time', the presence of pulps on my bookshelf, and the present tense of film all speak to media that

enact the tension between long histories of representation (the chain of periodical issues, the ephemerality of pulp paperbacks, the past tense of adaptation) and the immediacy of materiality (the singular periodical issue, the stack of bright covers on the shelf, the 'always *happening*' of film). Connected together, these arguments suggest that despite the differences of these contexts, when these female characters materialise in these ways, they take on lives of their own, in colour, embodied on screen, or even as the 'invisible lesbian'.

Their afterlives resonate for me, just as their breathing spaces did when I first came across them in the depths of Conrad's colonial discourse. It was meaningful for me to find these characters where I had not expected to, and to keep finding them afterwards, in bodies that I recognised. Maybe there is no getting over the dead-white-man-ness of Joseph Conrad. But imagine what could happen if even the texts that appear to exclude us are retooled as the resources that support us, if we can 'go after' (Sanders, 207) those texts, to look for trouble and find, in the bowels of 'then', bodies that are like us 'now'?

How are Freya and Antonia and Edith and Immada and Aïssa and Nina and Taminah and Mrs Almayer? Still here, with me.

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Appendix

In May 2017, I contacted Aurora Marion who plays Nina in *La Folie Almayer*. After talking on Skype, I sent a written list of questions. Here are her written responses, which I have left unedited.

How did you get cast in the film?

At the time, I was working as a waitress in London to earn a living while studying and singing in a jazz band as a guest in Brussels. When I graduated from university, I knew I wanted to act so I sent my CV to the three main belgian casting directors. My CV back then consisted of my name printed on a sheet of paper and a picture. I had no experience in the field except from my theoretical studies in theatre and films. One day, I was contacted by Gerda Diddens, one of the three casting directors mentioned above and the long collaborator of Chantal Akerman. Strangely enough, it was already planned for me to go to Belgium for one of those random jazz concerts and was then able to attend my first casting. I actually stayed in Brussels longer than expected as I had a recall. At that second casting, Chantal Akerman was present. I remember being very calm and relaxed because I had nothing to prove. I knew very little about my role, Nina, but she was already me, somehow. I remember Akerman hitting that table she was sitting at, creating a kind of rythm for me to follow as I spoke. She kept saying afterwards how much she knew from that meeting onwards that the role of Nina was mine. I, on the other hand, had to wait another two months to be told she picked me. It is also the way I said « Je ne suis pas blanche » (I am not white) that completely convinced her, as she told me later.

Did you read *Almayer's Folly* the novel, when you were preparing for the part and were you encouraged to?

I was not encouraged to read Almayer's folly but as it was my first experience as an actress I wanted to do things right to get every piece of information I could. And knowing that the people working with me on this production were very experienced, I needed to prepare myself the best way possible. I probably didn't read Almayer's folly as cautiously as I would read another book. Since I learned that Stanislas Merhar (Gaspard Almayer) had read the book I didn't understand why it was forbidden for me to read it too. So like a naughty kid doing things in secret, I read it quickly to finish with the "crime", unnoticed.

How prevalent was *Almayer's Folly* during filming? Did you or anyone in the production need to refer to it much?

Conrad was never referred to during the filming. It was not prevalent, I am afraid. But we were surrounded by his landscape. Conrad has seen and lived those many places we were

shooting at. Chantal Akerman had many stimuli for this story; Murnau, Lautréamont “Chant de Maldoror”, Ancient greek tragedies,... Of course, Conrad's novel was the foundation, the first layer, of our Almayer's folly but Akerman’s life had a greater influence on the scenario. I used to say that it is Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly* recipe with all his own ingredients but the sauce was Akerman's. A sauce that changes the taste of a dish. We were travelling by boat from one set to another like Conrad probably did travel too. Our gaze got lost several times either in the violent green of the bushes or just trying to find where the sea ends and the sky begins. It was like an experience between heaven and earth, if you don’t mind me saying that.

And Chantal Akerman was driving the entire team with her from heaven to earth, and back up, and back down as she was suffering from a psychological illness.

A depression that has lasted for many years nurturing her works of art and drove her to finally disappear to end this torture she was living.

What do you remember about encountering the story (as a novel or in the script) for the first time?

It felt so close to me. So close to my mother’s story. Her story that I carry in me. Like Akerman carried her mother’s experience of the Second World War throughout her life without having lived it personally. She was bearing that weight being a fruit of the holocaust period having to deal with a mother suffering from those post war traumatism.

My mother was one of the first half cast child that was made out of love and not rape. Her mother is Rwandan and her father was Belgian. She was born in 1949 in central Africa when mixed race couples were forbidden. When she was about to be five years old her parents looked for a school. She wasn't accepted anywhere. Nor in White catholic school nor in schools for black people as she was neither or. So her parents sent her to Belgium to her father’s village where she would be somehow accepted bearing her Belgian father’s name, but still neither black or white. She was only five years old when she was sent somewhere far away from anything she knew so far. Like Nina was. Nina is my mother, my mother that carries her own story as she carried me. I believe any child is impregnated by the experience of that womb it was created in.

Were there any characters that you were drawn to?

The father. Strangely, enough I can remember identifying with the father through the reading and being attracted to him during the shooting. A kind of an Oedipus complex appeared in our relationship. This desperate craving to be loved by her father, Nina translated it into hatred. And I believe that love and hate are so closely related that if you are able to love someone unconditionally it means that you have the same capacity to hate him unconditionally. Nina even said that her father was not in heaven, he never existed. Her father surely loved her in his own way, but not the way she wished to be loved. Consequently, she loved him her way.

Gaspard Almayer reminded me of my own father and of my grandfather too perhaps... As far as I remember, Chantal Akerman never said a word about her own father. Her mother was in her mind all the time. And a year after her mother died she committed suicide. That explains how strong of a relationship they had. They were depending on each other.

The captain Lingard would have been a better father to Nina. A model she was more predisposed to follow. In another life, Nina could have been another Captain Lingard. And I did work on Nina, having in mind that captain Lingard was the male version of her alter ego.

Did anything surprise you about the story?

It is the second time her mother is trying to save her kid from the hands of her father. And if she doesn't want her kid to stay with that father why doesn't she leave too? How this mother let her only child go with the first male Nina meets since her return? And Daïn is not any man, he is a rebellious soldier and an illegal trader. Why does Nina need to be with someone like this? To be accompanied of a man makes her escape of the father household feasible. A woman alone in that region would not survive, she would be a victim the minute she steps out of the house on her own. So the choice she made could be confusing but I can justify it. Dain is the embodiment of her fate. He is the creature of her dreams. Her dreams of happiness. She believed he would help her to have a new existence, being an outlaw. An existence without structure, without routine, without rules, … Freed from everything that has trapped her until now. She feels complete near him. But she doesn't love him, as she says, she perhaps never will. I remember Chantal Akerman telling me that when Dain finally dies, Nina is free. She can sing again (opening sequence).

How did you feel about playing Nina?

I must have felt misplaced above all. As Aurora in Cambodia, it was my first time in a thirld world country, first time in Asia. The images I could have seen prior my stay there were nothing compared to what my eyes really saw. The poverty was pouring out every household but the people were happy. They look happier than the people I bumped into on the London's underground. Cambodians are looking at you straight into the eyes and the way they smiled at me was revigorating despite the inhuman condition they are bound to live in. I will always remember those smiles. It made me realized that perhaps nobody had never truly smiled at me before. This misplacement and new surrounding helped me being that girl who didn't "fit in". Actually, I think that Nina never wanted to fit in. She is a careless person because while growing up she felt that nobody really cared for her except from her mother. She doesn't know what love is. She probably believed she had no heart, no mind and no feelings. But she spoke in burning words betraying her stone-like appearance. There was a fire inside her trying to be tamed. It has hard to deal with everything I believed was going on inside her and she was not willing to show.

What do you think are the most important parts of her identity?

This kind of rawness she embodies. The unfulfilled childhood: she didn't live as a child. And this still bursting adolescence we meet her in the film at 18 years old.

Forced to be quiet because she had none to talk to. She did not belong to that boarding school and never found her place there. She never found her place anywhere. She was never accepted, she was different. She grew up away from her parents. She became a young lady away from her parents. She never surrendered, she kept that flame hidden in her. She suffered in silence and that flame kept consuming anything she had left inside her as the years have gone by. She is a volcano that never erupted. Being observed and treated by her schoolmates like a wild animal, of a strange species, she became one.

How did you get into character?

Chantal got me into character. She made me go through everything she had to go through as a Jewish kid raised in Belgium. She was rebellious because she had orders to respect. Limit a kid and it will want to cross the boundaries and that is what boundaries are for. To be crossed. Rules have to be broken. And the "must do this and that" has to be ignored so the present is fully lived. That is how Chantal Akerman grew up. She crossed the boundaries in every field. And she somehow never really grew up and kept to a high standard her provocation skills through her behavior with others, and that can also be sensed in her films. The way she approaches a subject, writes about it and shoot it is one of a kind. And in terms of Almayer's folly, the scenario was so literary, that words couldn't be played. I mean that those strong words had to be said simply being already so fully charged. The situations had to be played not the words.

What was your experience of playing her?

It was my first time and like all "first times" it marked me. It was my first time in Cambodia, playing as an actress, being on a film set,… And somehow working with a director was very similar to my previous student jobs in bars. I wanted to serve and accomplish the director's desires to the best as I would make sure the client is king in those five stars hotel bars I used to work in. And this service made me feel important or at least useful for a determined time in someone's life. Of course, delivering what a director needs you to is crucial for the well being of the director and of the film. A film they carry like a baby for months and in this case for years.

My most difficult scene was when Nina came out of the boarding school. It was shot in a real orphanage. Coming out of those gates, I had an audience of small, very small children barefoot playing with garbage. And I had to pretend to be happy and proud to be free again, and full of dreams,… So I had to avoid those little eyes looking at me like I was some kind of Hollywood actress, admiring me, impressed by all this technology invading their school for the

day. It was really tough to be pretending that day. I just wanted to take all of them, take care of them, play with them,… but there is never enough time on a shooting day for what needs to be done. And even less free time to do what you would have liked to do. And those children were so many.

What was your relationship like with Chantal Akerman?

Not good in the beginning. My first days with her before the shooting started were awfully tense and wild. Chantal Akerman was working on this film for many years and kept coming and going from Cambodia, Malaysia to Brussels or Paris. When I got to Koh kong, where most of the film was shot, with the main actor Stanislas Merhar, Chantal Akerman was already there for months and desperate to start her film. The shooting was scheduled for a dozen of days after our arrival. And Chantal was on the edge. She was very rude and arrogant to me. Her sister eventually arrived and noticed the relationship Chantal was having with me. She asked her "why are you telling her what you hated others telling you as a child?". The table went silent. It was a relief for me to know that her meanness was subconsciously serving a purpose. She also realized it that day and changed her ways afterwards. I guess we had to go through this for her own good and for the sake of Nina. We then learned to love each other as time went passed and we cared for each other until her last days.

How did female relationships feature in the production process?

I don't really know how to answer that question. There was nothing specific that could describe the female relationships. I could probably say that there was a solidarity between women on the set. In hindsight, we were actually many women working on that movie compared to the next productions I did work on. The three main line producers were women, costume and make up of course were women, the first assistant camera was a woman,… We did care for each other. It was hard at times, a film crew abroad behaves like a "microcosmos" where all feelings and actions are multiplied in intensity and sometimes hard to handle.

One of the things that interests me most about the film, is that your face is literally in the centre of the shot for a lot of it, Nina is centre stage - How did you feel about the way your image was used in the film?

Chantal Akerman is known for her long Sequence shots. I kind of knew it having seen a few films of hers before. But I was not expecting to see my face on screen so big for so long. When the film was premiered in Venice, I remember wishing to become one with the chair I was sitting on. Especially for the opening shot where I did not expect to sing the whole song, the whole song, and staying on screen until the end of that song and the camera kept going closer and closer.

Who do you think is the main character of the film and why?

Thrive. And whatever that verb means for all characters. We all had one purpose in that fictional life we were given. Just one. Nina wanted to live. Just live. She had to take back her right to live and find her place somewhere.

What was your favourite thing about playing Nina?

I got to experience the difference between tourism and immigration. And to be able to play Nina I had to immigrate almost totally for a specific given time as Aurora in Cambodia.

How would you describe Nina?

She is stubborn. Under the appearance of a knight, a human is hiding. A human with emotions and feelings. Even though she said her heart is dead, it died in that prison she was kept in. She was always free. She was always free until the white men arrived and made the decisions for the locals. Like the white father made for his half cast daughter. And she is projecting all the hatred she has towards men in general, white men and white women onto her father. She doesn't want to belong to the white race. Sorry to speak in terms of colours but it is how Nina spoke and lived, separated from the rest because of her mixed race.

She has a corner in her soul, which allows her to go through and overcome many rough settings such as the strict monastery/boarding school, poverty, hunger, the jungle, killings,...

Her trajectory in life can be resumed through her navigations. She is sailing on rivers most of the times. And the river is different than the sea. The river is following a path, it is limited, it leads somewhere. But the sea offers many options and fills you with ambition. And she keeps looking straight ahead. Nina ends by the sea. She swims with Dain to the nearest boat with a plethora of possibilities.

How would you describe the relationship between Nina and her mother?

There was a solidarity between them despite the fact that they barely know each other. The last image Nina must have had of her mother was the attempted escape from those white men. They do understand each other with little being said. Nina believes in her mother's choices and advices. They are alter egos. If Nina had stayed she would have probably become someone like her mother. She would be married to a white man her father would have chosen for her. Since she has left the household too young she was forced to leave again and again. Nina is bound to leave like a vicious circle reproducing the same pattern over and over again. Like all human existences I believe. Her mother didn't want her child to lead a life like hers.

What's the main thing you hoped to get across in your performance?

Everything that was asked by the director. I tried to deliver everything that was asked from me. Emotionally, artistically and technically.

Do you think of the film as an adaptation or more as a work in its own right - when you think of it, do you think of Conrad?

No I think of Chantal's adaptation. The storyline is Conrad's but the film is Chantal's. She exists in all the characters she wrote. She gave them a bit of her life. Since the novel of Conrad is set in a specific time, Akerman's Almayer's folly is set in no specific time.

How has your experience working on that film affected you, your career and your performances since?

As I already said before it was my First time ever playing. It was my school. My drama school. My school of life. Trying to handle my place in this creative adventure.

That film premiered at the Venice Film Festival and that is where I met my next director, Athina Rachel Tsangari.

People are still contacting me today after seeing the film either for professional reason, either about the loss of Chantal and wishing to share a memory they have of her or simply congratulating me for no particular reason.